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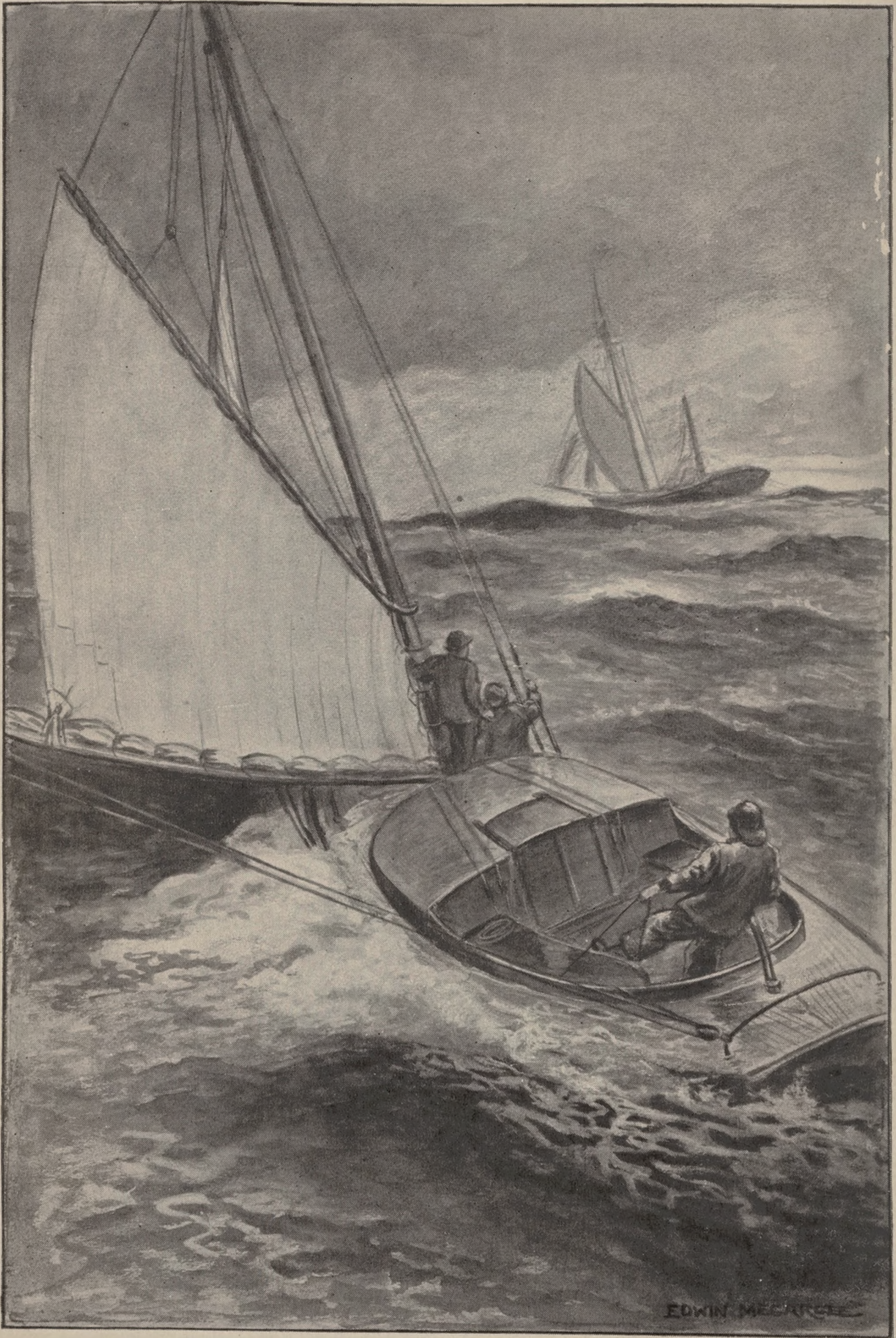
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THE BOY RANCHERS OF PUGET SOUND



EDWIN MCCARTHY

THE BOY RANCHERS OF PUGET SOUND

BY
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"Winston of the Prairie," "Lorimer of the Northwest," "Thurston of Orchard Valley," etc.*

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS
BY EDWIN MEGARGEE

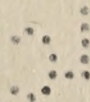
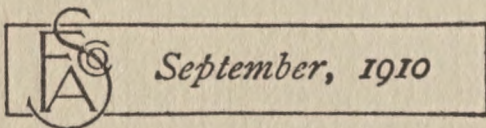


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THE BOY RANCHERS OF PUGET SOUND

The Boy Ranchers of Puget Sound

CHAPTER I

FRANK GOES WEST

IT was the middle of an afternoon in May. An old side-wheeler was steaming south toward Puget Sound across the land-locked waters that lie between Vancouver Island and the state of Washington. A little astern on one hand Mount Baker lifted its heights of eternal snow. On the other, and a little ahead, the Olympians rose white and majestic; and between, vast, dim forests rolled down to the ruffled, blue water. It seemed to Frank Whitney, sitting on the steamer's upper deck in the lee of her smokestack, that it was a wild and wonderfully beautiful country he had reached at last; for since leaving Vancouver, British Columbia, they had steamed past endless rocks and woods, while island after island faded into the smoke trail down the seething wake and great white mountains opened out, changed their shapes, and closed in on one another as the steamer went by. He had, however, not come there to admire the scenery, and as he watched the wonderful panorama unroll itself he looked back upon the troubles that had befallen him since he set out from Boston a little less than a year ago.

When he left that city he was but sixteen, and was, as he had cause to realize during the following twelve months, merely an average American boy, with a certain amount of alertness, self-reliance and common sense; though he might, perhaps, have had more of these de-

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sirable qualities, had he not been a trifle spoiled by his widowed mother before he went to Gorton school. He had, quite apart from his lessons, learned a few useful things there which probably he would never have learned at home, but he had been suddenly recalled, and his mother had informed him that it was now impossible for him to enter the profession for which he had been intended. Frank did not understand all the reasons for this, but he knew that they were connected with the fall in value of some railroad stock and the failure of a manufacturing company in which his mother held shares. She had, as she pointed out, his two younger sisters to provide for, and he must earn his living at once.

Frank found this much harder than he had expected. The subjects in which he excelled did not seem to be of the least use to business men, and the fact that he could play several games moderately well did not seem to count at all. There were people who were ready to give him a trial, but they seemed singularly unwilling to pay him enough to live in a way that he considered fitting; and this somewhat astonished as well as troubled him. In the end, a relative, who said that a young man with any grit and snap had better chances in the West, found him a position with a big milling company in Minneapolis. Frank accepted the position, but soon found it not much to his liking. The people he met were not like his Boston friends. They were mostly Germans and Scandinavians, and their ways were not those to which he had been accustomed. What was worse, they hustled him in the milling company's offices, and instead of teaching him the business kept him busy licking stamps, copying letters and answering telephones, which did not seem to him a fitting occupation for an intellectual lad.

He bore it, nevertheless, because he had to, until one day there came a climax, when a clerk who had bullied

him all along assigned to him a particularly disagreeable task which was really outside his duties. In return, in a fit of very foolish anger, Frank screwed the clerk's new hat down tight in a copying-press, and it happened that the secretary came upon the scene during the trouble that followed. The secretary had an unpleasant temper, and when he walked out of the general office Frank sat down at his desk boiling with indignation and almost stupefied. There was, however, not the least doubt that he was fired.

He spent a very dismal evening afterward, for one thing, at least, was clear — he could not go home to Boston and become a burden on his mother. But the flour trade was bad in Minneapolis just then, and business in St. Paul did not seem much better, so eventually he found employment in the offices of a milling company in Winnipeg. He suffered from the extreme cold during the winter there. The cold of Massachusetts, as he discovered, is very different from the iron frost which shuts down on the Canadian prairie and never slackens its grip for months together. The clothing he had brought from Boston was not warm enough, and his small earnings would only provide him with shelter in the cheapest quarters. Still, he held on until trade grew slack in the early spring and he was turned adrift again. This time he felt that he had had enough of business. He had heard and read of men who burrowed for treasure in the snow-clad ranges, broke wild horses, and cleared the forests, out in the farthest West. There was a romance in that life surpassing anything that seemed likely to be got out of the addition of flour invoices or the licking of stamps, and he wrote a letter to an old friend of his dead father, who lived on a ranch near Puget Sound. It was some time before he got an answer telling him rather tersely to come along.

Frank started the day after he received it, and was now, he supposed, within a short distance of his journey's

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end. He had never seen his father's friend, and knew nothing of what he would be required to do at the ranch, though he fancied that all that was necessary could readily be learned by an intelligent lad. In this, however, he was wrong.

Suddenly the steamer's whistle hurled a great blast out across the waters, and, looking around, Frank saw, not far ahead, a long point strewn with rocks and streaked with wisps of pines. There was, however, no sign of life on it, and he turned to a deck-hand who strode by.

"Can that be Bannington's?" he asked.

"Yes," the man informed him. "I guess that's just what it is."

"But there's nobody about," objected Frank.

The deck-hand grinned.

"Did you expect it was like Seattle or Port Townsend? There's a store to the place, and they've got a post-office back among the rocks. We lay off and whistle, and if there's no sign of a shore boat she goes on again."

He went forward with a jump as a man came out of the pilot house with a pair of glasses in his hand.

"Run up slow," he ordered. "There's nothing coming yet."

The big side-wheels beat more slowly and the whistle called again, but there was still only the ruffled blue water with white flecks on it and the rapidly rising pines. Frank watched them anxiously, for he had only about two dollars in his pocket, and it seemed quite possible that he might be carried on to Seattle, in which case he had not the faintest notion as to how he was to get back. It was quite certain that he could not pay any more steamboat fares.

A minute or two later the man with the glasses raised his hand as a sail crept out around the point, and the big wheels stopped. The strip of canvas grew into a gaff mainsail and a jib; the hull beneath it emerged at

intervals from the little tumbling seas; and it became apparent to Frank for the first time that it was blowing rather hard. The sail seemed to be dripping and he could see the spray flying about the shapeless figure at the helm. Then the steamboat officer motioned to him.

"Are you getting off here?" he asked.

Frank answered rather dubiously that this was his intention.

"Then you'd better get down on to the wheel-case bracings with your grip. I don't know how they're going to take you off, but I guess they'll shoot her up head to wind and you'll have to jump."

Frank got out on the guard-framing on the after side of the wheel and watched the boat drive by, swung up on a little sea some distance away. Half of her hull seemed to be under water, though the fore part of it was hove up streaming into the air. She rolled wildly with her big mainsail squared right out and the jib, which hung slack, dripping water. Then she came round and headed for the steamer, lying down all slanted to one side, while the water sluiced along her lee deck, and Frank made out a boy crouching under the sail with a rope in his hand. It seemed to him that the boat must inevitably ram the steamer and smash in her bows. Then a hail reached him.

"Hello, pilot house! Shove her astern soon as we're clear of you!"

Somebody shouted an answer, and the steamer swung out, lifting a row of wet plates out of the water and burying them again with a gurgling splash. A glance around showed Frank a deck-hand standing behind him with a long, spiked pole and a crowd of passengers leaning over the rails of the deck above. How he was to get into the boat he did not know, for the thing was beginning to look difficult. Then there was another shout from the figure at her helm:

"That you, Whitney?"

Frank waved his hand in answer, hastily grabbing up the small bag which contained his few possessions. The wheel-casing sank again into a ridge of frothing brine which swirled about his feet, and he felt that it would be a good deal wiser to climb back to the deck above and go on to Seattle. This, however, was out of the question, even if there had not been so many passengers looking on, and it was comforting to remember that he could swim a little. The next moment the deck-hand touched his arm.

"I'll sling your grip aboard her as she shoots," he said. "Then jump, and stick to anything you get your hands on."

The boat was now only seven or eight yards away, nearer the steamer's stern, but as Frank gazed at her she suddenly swayed upright with a frantic thrashing of canvas, and shot forward head to wind beneath the vessel's side. The next moment his bag went hurtling through the air, and he heard the deck-hand shout something in his ear. Then he set his lips and jumped.

He struck something hard with his knees, and was conscious of a sudden chill as the brine washed over one leg, but he had his hands clenched tight on a strip of wet wood, and somebody seized him by the shoulder. Making a determined effort he dragged himself up on the narrow side deck, and fell in a heap into the bottom of the boat. When he scrambled to his feet again the big side-wheel was splashing amidst a welter of churned-up foam as the steamer pushed away from them, and, in the boat, the boy he had already noticed was tugging desperately at a rope.

"Get hold and heave!" he cried.

Frank did as the boy directed. Then the helmsman waved his hand.

"Not too flat! Belay at that! Get down here aft, both of you!"

Frank staggered aft a pace or two, and sitting down breathless and dripping gazed about him. The boat looked a good deal bigger than she had appeared from the steamer, and, as a matter of fact, she was a half-decked sloop of about twenty-four feet in length. Just then she was slanted well down on one side, with the water foaming along her depressed deck and showers of spray beating into her over her weather bow, while the jib above her bowsprit every now and then plunged into the short, white-topped seas. There seemed to be some water inside her, for it washed up above the floorings at every heave. In a few moments Frank had recovered his breath sufficiently to look around at his companions. One was a boy of about his own age who smiled at him. He had a bronzed skin and a kindly expression, and looked lean and wiry.

"You're Frank Whitney?" asked the boy.

Frank acknowledged that this was his name, and the other proceeded to introduce himself and his companion.

"I'm Harry Oliver, and, as you're going to stay with us, we've got to hit it off together."

Then he turned and indicated the ruddy-faced, red-haired man who held the helm.

"This is Jake, one of the smartest choppers and trailers on the Pacific Slope. There aren't many of the boys who could have picked you off that steamboat in a breeze of wind as he did."

"Oh, pshaw!" said the helmsman with a grin.

Neither of them had said anything striking in the way of welcome, but Frank felt quickly at ease with them. As a rule, the new acquaintances he had made in business farther east seemed to expect him to recognize their superiority, or, at least, to understand that it was a privilege to be admitted into their society. His present companions, however, somehow made it plain that as long as he was willing to be commonly civil there was no reason why they should not get on well together,

for which he was thankful, though he felt that any attempt to put on airs with them would probably lead to trouble.

"How far is it to your father's ranch?" he asked presently.

"Twelve miles," responded Harry. "With a head wind like this one, it means from eighteen to twenty-four miles' sailing. It depends, for one thing, on Jake's steering."

"Thirty, sure," broke in the helmsman, "if you had the tiller."

"How's that?" asked Frank.

"Know anything about sailing?"

Frank confessed his ignorance, and Jake nodded to Harry.

"Show him," he said. "He has got to learn and you can teach the fellow who'll allow he doesn't know anything. The kind we've no use for is the one that knows too much."

Harry laid a wet finger on the hove-up weather deck.

"Now," he began, "a boat or a ship under sail can go straight to the place she's bound for as long as she has the wind anywhere from right behind her to a little forward on her side. In fact, as she'll lie up within a few points of the wind, there's only a small segment of the circle you can't sail her straight into."

He traced a circle on the deck and then placed his finger over about a quarter of the circumference of it.

"She won't go there."

"But supposing you want to?"

"Then, if the wind's ahead, you have to beat." He drew two lines across the circle at right angles to each other and laid his finger at the end of one. "Say we're here at north and the cove we're going to lies about south. Well, you get your sheets in flat—same as we have them now—and you sail up this way, at this angle to the wind." He ran a slanting line across the circle

until it touched the rim. "That brings you here; then you come round, and go off at the same angle on the opposite tack, which brings you right up to the cove. You can do it in two long tacks, or — and it's the same thing — in a lot of little ones, each at the same angle to the wind; but how many degrees there are in that angle and when you get there depends on how your sails are cut and how smart you are at steering her."

Frank understood the gist of it, but there were one or two difficulties, and he was not ashamed to ask a question:

"What makes her go slantways against the wind? Why doesn't it blow her back, or sideways?"

"It does," Jake broke in dryly, "if you don't sail her right, or it blows hard enough."

"What makes a kite go up slantways against, or on, the wind, which is the same thing in sailing?" continued Harry. "Because with the wind and the string both pulling her, that's the line of least resistance." He paused, and added deprecatingly, "I was at school at Tacoma and as I'd a notion I might take up surveying, they pounded some facts into me that made this kind of thing easier to get hold of. A boat goes ahead on the wind because, considering the shape of her, it's the easiest way; and this is what stops her going off sideways to lee." He kicked a high narrow box which ran along the middle of the boat. "It holds the center-board — a big plate that's down deep in the water now. Before the wind could shove her off sideways — and it does a little — it would have to press that flat plate sideways through the water."

Frank made a sign of comprehension.

"That's about the size of it," said Jake. "Now I guess it would be more useful if you got some of the water out of her."

Harry, who explained that there was something wrong with the pump, pulled up one of the flooring boards and

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invited Frank to dip a bucket into the cavity and hand it up to him when it was full. Frank endeavored to do so, but found it difficult, for the water which surged to and fro as the sloop plunged left the bottom of the hole almost dry one moment and the next came splashing back so rapidly that before he could get a fair scoop with the bucket it had generally gone again. Besides, the motion every now and then flung him off his knees; but he toiled on with his head down for nearly half an hour, when a horrible nausea mastered him and he staggered to the foam-swept lee coaming. For the next ten minutes he felt desperately unhappy, and when he turned around again there was a grin on the faces of his companions.

"She'll do," said Harry. "You want to look to weather and get the wind on your face. That's the best way to keep a hold on your dinner."

Frank suddenly remembered that he had had no dinner. He had had only a dollar or two left in his possession, and after considering the steamboat tariff he had decided to dispense with the meal. In spite of this fact and the unpleasant sensations he felt, he was conscious of a certain satisfaction with his new surroundings. The seasickness would pass, and grappling with the winds of heaven and the charging seas seemed a finer thing than adding up the price of flour or sticking stamps on letters. Here man's skill, nerve and quickness were pitted against the variable elements, and Frank had a suspicion — which, as it happened, was quite justified — that if Jake made a blunder the next white-topped comber would come foaming across the bows of the craft. It was only his cool judgment and ready hand on the tiller that swung her safely over them.

Raising himself a little he glanced ahead. The steamer and her smoke trail had vanished some time ago, and the white Olympians had faded, too. Evening was drawing on. The sky was now a dismal, dingy gray, and the

lead-blue water was streaked with flecks and curls of foam. It seemed to him that the sea was steadily getting higher, and there was not the least doubt that the sloop was slanting more sharply and throwing the spray all over her.

"It looks bad up yonder, doesn't it?" he queried in anxious tones.

"I allow we might have more wind by and by," Jake answered laconically. "Seems to me she has about all the sail she can stand up to on her now."

He had scarcely finished speaking when a comber curled over at its top rose up close ahead, and the boat went into it to the mast. Part of it poured over the forward head ledge into the open well, and the rest sluiced foaming down the slanted deck to lee, through which she lurched clear, with the water splashing and gurgling inside her.

"We'll heave another reef down right away," said Jake. "Get forward, Harry, and claw that headsail off her."

The boy seized a wet sail that lay in the well, and as he crawled forward with it the sloop rose almost upright, with her mainsail banging and thrashing furiously. When he loosed a rope the jib ran partly down its stay, and then jammed, filling out and emptying with sudden shocks that shook the stout spar beneath it and the reeling mast. Harry, however, crawled out on the bowsprit with his feet braced against a wire—a lean, dripping figure that dipped in the tumbling seas—and Frank, seeing that he was struggling vainly with the sail, scrambled forward to help him, sick as he was. Water flowed about his knees on the plunging deck, flying ropes whipped him, and the spray was hurled into his face, but he could think of no reason why the Western boy should do more than he could. He crouched down, hauling savagely on a rope at which Harry pointed, and by and by the sail fell upon both of them. They dragged

it in, made it fast, and set a smaller one in place of it, after which they floundered aft to where Jake was struggling with the mainsail.

He had hauled down what Frank afterward learned was the leach of it, and was now standing with his toes on the coaming and his chest upon the boom, pulling down the hard, drenched canvas and tying the little bits of rope that hung in a row from it around the boom.

"Hustle!" he shouted. "Get those reef-points in!"

Frank took his place with his companion, and tried not to look at the frothing water close beneath him as he leaned out on the jerking boom. For the most part, the big spar lay fairly quiet, but now and then the canvas above it shook itself with a bang. It cost him a strenuous effort to drag each handful of it down in turn, and he discovered afterward that he had broken two of his nails. He lost his breath, the perspiration started from every pore in his skin, and he was sick and dizzy, but he managed to hold on. At last it was finished, and soon afterward Jake, driving the sloop on her course again, turned to Harry.

"She'll make nothing of it against this breeze," he said. "We'll up-helm and look for shelter under Tourmalin."

Harry, bracing himself against the strain, let a rope run through the clattering blocks, the bow swung around, and the motion became a little easier.

"We'll be snug beneath the pines in an hour," said Jake, nodding reassuringly.

Frank found the time quite long enough. He was wet and dizzy, and the way the big frothing ridges came tumbling up out of the growing darkness was rather terrifying. They heaved themselves up above the boat, and every time that one foamed about her she slanted alarmingly over to leeward. At last, when it had grown quite dark, a shadowy blur that grew into a wisp of tall pines rose up ahead, and a minute or two later there

was an almost bewildering change from the rolling and plunging as the sloop ran into smooth water. Her sails dropped, the anchor chain rattled out, and by and by they were all sitting in the little cabin, which was scarcely three feet high, and Jake was cramming bark and kerosene rags into the stove.

Half an hour later Frank forced himself to eat a little canned beef and drink some coffee, and then Harry told him he could lie down on what seemed to be a moderately dry sail. He had scarcely done so when he fell asleep. Jake, who had been watching him, turned the lantern so that the light fell on his face.

"He was mighty sick," he observed, a kindly smile lighting up his rugged features, "but he stayed with it through the reefin'. Your father should make something of him. I guess he'll do."

CHAPTER II

THE BUSH

FRANK awoke a little before daylight, feeling considerably better. The nausea and dizziness had gone, and the sloop seemed to be lying almost still, which was a relief to him. Then he noticed by the light of a lamp that his companions' places were empty, and presently he heard them talking in the well. Crawling out through the narrow doorway, he stood up shivering in the coldness of the dawn.

There were dim black trees and shadowy rocks close in front of him, with a white wash about the latter, for a smooth swell worked in around a point from open water. He could hear the rumble of the surf upon the reefs, and though he could scarcely feel a breath of wind upon his face the wailing of the black pines suggested that it was blowing still. He could smell the clean resinous scent of them and it seemed to him that they were singing wild, barbaric songs. Afterward, when he knew them better, he learned that the pines and their kin, the cedars and balsams and redwoods, are never silent altogether. Even when their fragrance steals out heavy and sweet as honey under the fierce sunshine of a windless day, one can hear faint elfin whisperings high up among their somber spires. Then he saw that Jake was standing on the side deck, apparently gazing at the white surf about the end of the point.

"No," he mused, "she wouldn't face it. The breeze hasn't fallen any, and the sea'll be steeper. Guess you'd better leave me here, and take the Indian trail."

Harry agreed with this.

"We'll get off as soon as we've had breakfast; and, as I did the cooking yesterday, it's your turn this morning. There's still a little fire in the stove."

Jake disappeared into the cabin, and presently came out again and was filling his pipe when Harry sprang up suddenly on the deck.

"Hello!" he cried. "There's a schooner yonder!"

It was growing a little clearer and Frank, turning around, saw a tall black spire of canvas cutting against the sky. He made out a frothy whiteness beneath it where the swell broke on the vessel's bows, and the sight of her singularly stirred his imagination. She had appeared so suddenly, probably from behind the point, and she looked ghostly in the uncertain light. She ran in under her headsails and boom-foresail with her main-mast bare, rising higher and growing clearer all the while. By and by there was a splash, and a voice broke through the wailing of the trees.

"Three fathom," it said. "You can luff her in a little."

Harry seemed about to hail her, but Jake gripped his arm, and they all stood silent while the schooner crept up abreast of them. The little sloop, lying with the shadowy land close behind her, had evidently not been seen. Then the vessel commenced to fade again, and in a few minutes she had vanished altogether.

"It looks as if there might have been some truth in old Sandberg's tale," Harry remarked thoughtfully. "It's kind of curious that halibut fisherman from Bannington's said he saw her too."

"He said she'd a white stripe round her. Sandberg allowed it was green," objected Jake.

"That wouldn't prove anything. They could soon paint the stripe another color."

"What would they want to do it for?"

"What does a schooner want running in here? There's no freight to be picked up nearer than Port Townsend."

"That," said Jake dryly, "is just what I don't know. What's more, I don't want to. She might have run in for bark for cooking, or maybe for water."

Harry laughed. "If she has come down from Seattle they'd get plenty cordwood or, if they wanted it, stove coal there, and I guess a skipper wouldn't waste a fair wind like this one to save two or three dollars. The thing's mighty curious. That vessel's been seen twice, anyway, and nobody seems to know where she comes from or where she goes."

"Well," Jake observed stolidly, "she doesn't belong to you or me, and if you want your breakfast it should be ready."

They crawled into the cabin, and when they had made a meal Jake sculled the sloop in near enough to the steep beach for them to jump. Then he flung a small packet after them.

"It's the most I can spare you, as I mayn't get a slant round the reefs until to-morrow," he said. "Anyway, it will do you two meals, and you ought to fetch the ranch by sundown. You want to head right up the valley until you strike a big log that lies across the river. When you get over, cross the neck of the ridge where it's lowest. You'll see the clearing from the top of it."

Harry said this was plain enough and moved away across the shingle, Frank following him cautiously when they reached the fringe of driftwood which divided beach from bush. Whitened logs and barked branches were scattered about in tangled confusion where the water had left them, and it was with difficulty that the lads scrambled over the barrier. Then Frank stopped breathless, with one leg wet to the knee and a rent in his trousers.

"It's pretty rough going, if this is an average sample," he panted.

"You'll find it a good deal worse before we reach the ranch," Harry answered with a laugh.

He strode forward, and Frank looked around with wonder when they plunged into the bush, for he had never seen a wood of that kind except in pictures of the giant Californian Sequoia. There are, of course, pines in the eastern states, but they seemed pigmies by comparison with these tremendous conifers which were already tall and stately when Columbus sailed from Spain. They ran up far above the boy in huge cylindrical columns before they flung out their first great branches, which met and crossed like the ribs of high-vaulted arches, holding up a roof of dusky greenery. Beneath, there was a dim shadow, and a tangle of such luxuriant vegetation as is seen, excepting in the tropics, probably only upon the warm, damp Pacific Slope.

There was another difference which struck Frank. The eastern woods that he had seen were clear of wreckage, for lumber and fuel are valuable there, and the ax had kept them clean, but this forest was strewn with huge logs and branches, some of which evidently had fallen years ago. Thickets of all kinds had sprung up between, and these were filled with tufts of unrolling fern which Harry told him would grow six or eight feet high. Through the midst of it all there twisted a narrow path which Frank remembered Jake had mentioned as the Indian trail.

"Have you Indians here?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said Harry, "we have a few Siwashes, though there are more of them up in Canada. They seem fond of Indians there."

"Are they quiet?"

Harry chuckled. "You don't want to get them mixed with the redskins of the plains, though I suppose where they're not wiped out they're pretty quiet too. These fellows are a different breed. Most of them are sailors

and fishermen, and they dress much the same as you and I do. They come up these rivers now and then after the salmon, and they made this trail. You can tell that by the looks of it."

"How?"

"It goes in and out, and where there's an obstacle it winds around. That's the difference between a white man's and an Indian's nature. The Siwash strikes a big fir log, and he walks around it, if he has to keep on doing it for months. It doesn't seem to worry him that he's wasting a minute or two every time. Then the white man comes along and gets to work with his ax. He goes right straight through. It's born in him."

Frank had made a sign of understanding. He knew something of the history of the old great nations as well as that of his own country, and he remembered another dominant race that ages ago blazed its trails from Rome across all Europe and far into Asia. It was characteristic of those men that, turning aside for no obstacle, they went straight, and long after their power had perished their roads remained, running, as the crow flies, through morasses and over mountains and rivers. His own people had done much the same, whittling west with the axes through the eastern woods, and then pushing on with their wagons across the lonely plains, until they drove the steel track through the snow-clad Rockies and over the Sierras. They died in shoals on the journey, but it was the march of a nation, and always more came on, the lumberman after the trapper, the track-grader on the cowboy's heels, with ranches and farms and factories growing up along the line. Now they had reached the Pacific, and Frank wondered vaguely whether that would be the limit, or where they were going then. It was, however, a question that seemed too big for him.

"This country's rough on one's clothes," he said ruefully, looking down at a second tear in his trousers.

Harry laughed. He was dressed in old duck overalls, long boots, and a battered gray hat.

"That's a fact. What you want to wear is leather. There were two sports from back East came out to hunt last fall, and they had their things made of some patent cloth warranted to turn water and resist any thorns. Jake went along to cook for them." He paused with a chuckle and added, "They were wearing their blankets because they hadn't any clothes left when he brought them back."

They went on for an hour or so until they came out upon the bank of a frothing river which roared among the rocks in a shallow cañon. There was no way of reaching the water, had they desired it, and, as Harry had predicted, the trail the followed grew rapidly worse. In places it wound perilously along narrow ledges beneath a dripping wall of rock, in others it led over banks of stones which had slipped down from the heights above. The boys made very slow progress until noon, when they stopped for a meal from the package Jake had thrown them. While they ate it Frank looked down again at his boots, which were already badly ripped.

"They were new just before I left Winnipeg," he said. "In some ways the people in Europe are ahead of us. There are one or two countries where they make their shoes of wood."

Harry was too busy to make an answer, and when he had finished eating he carefully tied up the packet, which was now considerably smaller, before he turned to his companion.

"We'd better be hitting the trail," he said. "Unless we can make the ranch by sundown, we'll get mighty little supper."

They pushed on for a couple of hours, still floundering and stumbling among the rocks. Harry stopped for a moment where the bush was thinner and pointed to a

big gap in a ridge of hillside three or four miles away.

"That's the neck," he said. "The log we cross the river on is somewhere abreast of it. We surely can't have passed the thing."

They went on a little farther, but there was no sign of the log. Presently Harry stopped again with an exclamation, catching a glimpse of a great branchless fir which rose out of a welter of foam in the bottom of the cañon.

"There she is," he exclaimed, "jammed in where we certainly can't get down to her. It will be difficult to go straight this time, but we'll have to try."

Frank drew a pace or two nearer the edge of the cañon, and felt a creepy shiver run through him as he looked down. The rock he stood upon arched out a little over the shadowy hollow, through the bottom of which the wild waters seethed and clamored. He supposed that he stood at least sixty feet above them. The rock on the opposite side also projected, so that the rift was wider at the bottom than at the top. In one place, however, the crest of it had broken away and plunged into the gulf, leaving a short slope down which stones and soil had slid. Its lower edge lay about twelve feet beneath him, though the distance would have been rather less if it could have been measured horizontally.

"How are we to get across?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Jump," said Harry curtly. "Can't you do it?"

"No," Frank answered with some reluctance.

"Scared?" asked Harry, looking at him curiously.

"I am, but it's not that altogether."

"You didn't seem to want sand when you jumped into the boat."

Frank stood silent a moment or two with a flush on his face. Had he been forced to make the choice a year earlier, he probably would have jumped and chanced it from shame of appearing afraid or of owning his

inferiority to another, but he had learned a little sense since then.

"It was different then," he explained. "I was scared — badly scared — but I felt I could do the thing if I forced myself to it. Now I'm almost certain that I can't."

"Yes," owned Harry, thoughtfully, "that's quite right. One hasn't much use for the fellow whose great idea is to keep himself from getting hurt, but when a thing's too big for you it's best to own it." He dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand. "The question is how we're going to get across, and my notion is that we'd better head right up into the bush. The river will be getting smaller, and it forks somewhere. Each branch will probably be only half the size, and I guess the cañon can't go on very far."

It occurred to Frank that considering the nature of the country it would be singularly inconvenient if the cañon went on for another league or two, particularly as they had only a handful of provisions left, but he followed his companion, and they stumbled and floundered forward all the afternoon. There was now no trail to follow, and where they were not forced to scramble over slippery rock, fallen trees and thorny brakes barred their way. Still, there was nothing to indicate that the cañon was dying out, and where they could have reached the water it either foamed furiously between rocky ledges or spun round in horrible black eddies on the verge of a wild, yeasty turmoil. They looked at these spots and abandoned any thought of swimming.

Evening came at length, and they sat down beneath a big cedar where the roar of the river rang about them in deep pulsations. A chilly wind was wailing in the tops of the pines, and trails of white mist commenced to drift in and out among their trunks, which showed

through it spectrally. Harry gazed about him with a rueful grin on his face.

"If I'd an ax, one or two matches, and a couple of blankets, I'd make you quite snug. Then with a few groceries, a kettle, and a spider, we'd have all any one could reasonably want."

"You haven't got them," Frank commented. "Wouldn't it save time if you wished for a furnished house?"

"I'd 'most as soon have an ax. Then I could make a shelter that would, anyway, keep us comfortable enough, and when I'd cut you a good layer of spruce twigs you wouldn't want a better bed. If I'd a rifle I might get a blue grouse for supper. Still"—and he laughed—"as you say, we haven't got them, and we couldn't do any cooking without matches. Curious, isn't it, what a lot of things you want, and that in most cases you have to get another fellow to make them?"

Frank agreed with this, but he had never realized the truth of it as he did just then. It was clear that the man who made all he wanted must live as the Indians or grosser savages did, and that it was only the division of employments that provided one with the comforts of civilization. Every man, it seemed, lived by the toil of another, for while on the Pacific Slope they turned the forests into dressed lumber and raised fruit and wheat, the clothes they wore, and their saws and plows and axes, came from the East. One could clear a ranch on Puget Sound only because a host of other men puddled liquid iron or pounded white-hot steel in the forges of, for instance, Pennsylvania. Frank would very much have liked to provide his companion with the fruit of somebody else's labor in the shape of a few matches, which would have made a cheerful fire possible.

In the meanwhile Harry had opened the packet and divided its contents equally.

"There's not enough to keep any over," he observed. "We have got to make the ranch to-morrow."

They ate the little that was left them, and then set to work to search for a young spruce from which they might obtain a few branches, but they failed to find one small enough even to climb. Coming back they lay down among the cedar sprays, which seemed rather wet, and it was some time before Frank could go to sleep. He was still hungry, and the roar of the river and the strangeness of his surroundings had a peculiar effect on him. The mist, which was getting thicker, rested clammily on his face, and crawled in denser wreaths among the black trunks which stood out here and there from the encircling gloom. Drops of moisture began to fall upon him from the branches, and once or twice he cautiously moved an elbow until it touched his companion. It was consoling to feel that he was not alone.

At length, however, he fell asleep, and awaking in the gray light of dawn staggered to his feet when Harry called him, feeling very miserable. He was chilled to the bone. His shoulders ached, his knees ached, and one hip-joint ached worse than all, while his energy and courage seemed to have melted out of him. As a matter of fact, nobody unused to it feels very animated on getting up before sunrise from a bed on the damp ground.

"As we have to reach home to-night, we may as well get a move on," announced Harry. "It's about four o'clock now, and it won't be dark until after eight."

The prospect of a sixteen hours' march with nothing to eat all the while did not appeal to Frank. It was the first time in his life that he had felt downright hungry, and this fast had made him the more sensitive to an unpleasant pain in his left side.

"If you're not sure about the way, wouldn't it be

better if we went back to Jake?" he suggested. "It seems a pity we didn't think of it earlier."

"I did," Harry answered smilingly. "The trouble is that Jake would clear out the minute the wind dropped a little or shifted enough to let him get round the head. Besides, he'd have mighty little to eat if he were still lying behind the point when we got there. When your letter reached us we'd hardly time to run down to Bannington's to meet the steamer, so I just grabbed what I could find, and we sailed in a few minutes."

Frank said nothing further, and they pushed on doggedly into the shadowy bush. It was wrapped in a thick white mist, and every brake they smashed through dripped with moisture. Except for the clamor of the river, everything was wonderfully still — so still, indeed, that the heavy silence was beginning to pall upon Frank, who suddenly turned to his companion.

"Isn't there anything alive besides ourselves in this bush?" he asked.

"That," replied Harry, "is more than I can tell you. We have bears, and a few timber wolves, besides two kinds of deer and several kinds of grouse, and some of them are quite often about, but there are belts of bush where for some reason you can't find one."

They went on again, following up the river for an hour or two. In the meanwhile the mist melted, and Frank could see the endless ranks of mighty trees stretch away before him until they merged into a blurred columnar mass. At last the cañon, which was growing shallower, forked off into two branches, and they followed one branch until a broken rocky slope led them down to the water. It was a dull greenish color and foamed furiously past them among great stones. There was no means of ascertaining how deep it was and the boys looked at each other dubiously for a moment or two. Then Harry made a little gesture.

"We have to get across," he said.

Frank, without waiting for his resolution to fail him, plunged in on the instant, and a couple of steps took him well above his knees. The water seemed icy cold. As a matter of fact, it was mostly melted snow, and the drainage from the glaciers had given it the curious green color. The gravel commenced to slide away beneath Frank's feet, and by the time the foam was swirling round his waist he was gasping and struggling savagely. There was a big, eddying pool not far away and, though he could swim a little, he had no desire to be swept into it. A moment or two later he was driven against a rock with a violence that shook all the breath out of him. He clung to it desperately until Harry came floundering by and held out his hand. They made a yard or two together and then Harry slipped suddenly, jerking Frank off his feet as he rolled over in the flood. Frank went down overhead and as he felt himself being swept along toward the eddy he exerted all his energy in a struggle to regain his footing. He clutched at a rock, but the swirling waters only carried him past. Half dazed and breathless he was flung against another rock. This time, with a great effort, he managed to hold on, and when he stood up, gasping, he found that the water now reached only to his knees. In another minute he and Harry were safe on dry land.

Half an hour later they crossed the other creek, and soon afterward Frank sat down limply in the warm sunlight, which at last came filtering between the thinner trees.

"I must have a rest," he gasped.

"There's just this trouble," Harry pointed out. "If you rest any time you won't want to get up again."

"If I go on now I'll drop in another few hundred yards," declared Frank.

It was probably no more than the truth. He had been clever at athletics and open air games, but, as it happened, he had been able to learn them easily. Be-

sides, he had been indulged by his mother and had been rather a favorite at school, and as one result of it he fell short of the hardihood usually acquired by the boy who has everything against him. After all, an hour's exercise in a gymnasium or an hour and a half spent over a game amidst applause and excitement is a very different thing from the strain of unrelaxing effort that must be made all day when there is nobody to cheer. He did not want to rest, but his worn-out body rebelled and mastered him.

"Aren't — you — played out?" he stammered weakly.

"Oh, yes," replied Harry with a grin. "Still, in this country you're quite often dead played out and have to go on again."

"But if you can't?"

"Then," said Harry dryly, "you have to keep on trying until you're able to."

It struck Frank that this might be painful and his heart sank. After a while he tried another question:

"Don't people get lost in the bush every now and then?"

"Why, yes," was the answer. "There was a man strayed off from a picnic just outside one of the cities not long ago and they didn't find him until a month or two afterward. He was lying dead not a mile from a graded road."

Frank shivered inwardly at this.

"Still, I suppose you generally have something to guide you — the moss on the north side of the trees? I've heard that people who don't know about it walk around in rings."

"I must have gone pretty straight the only time I was lost," laughed Harry; "and it's mighty hard to find moss in some parts of the bush. In others it's all around the trees. I'd rather have a big peak as a guide. You have heard about people walking round, but I wonder whether you have heard that when they're badly

scared they'll walk right across a trail without seeing it? "

"Is that a fact?" Frank asked in astonishment.

"Sure!" said Harry. "A lost man will sometimes walk across a logging road without the slightest idea that he's doing it. Anyway, I know where the homestead lies. It's only a question of holding out until we reach it."

Frank was sincerely pleased to hear this, and by and by he rose with an effort and they went on again.

CHAPTER III

THE RANCH

DUSK was not far away when the boys, stumbling down a low hillside, came into sight of an oblong clearing in the forest with a wooden house standing on one side of it. That was all Frank noticed, for he found it difficult to keep himself on his feet, and his sight seemed hazy. Indeed, he fell down once or twice in the steeper places, and had some trouble in getting up; and after that he had only a confused recollection of crossing an open space and entering a dwelling. A man shook hands with him, and a woman in a print dress made him sit down in a low chair before she set out a bountiful meal. Soon after he had eaten a considerable share of it Harry led him into a very little room where a bed like a shelf with a side to it was fixed against one wall. Five minutes later he was blissfully unconscious of his recent painful experience.

The sun was streaming in through the window when he awoke, feeling wonderfully refreshed, and, dressing himself in some overalls which had been laid across the foot of his bed, he walked out into the larger general room. It had uncovered walls of logs and a very roughly boarded floor, and there seemed to be little in it besides a stove, a table and several chairs.

A brown-faced man with a little gray in his hair sat at one end of the table and at the other end sat a woman resembling him and of about the same age. Harry, sitting between them, was apparently engaged in narrating their adventures. Frank, who took the place laid out for him, found that his supper had not spoiled his

breakfast, for he fell upon the pork, potatoes, dried apricots, hot cakes and syrup with an excellent appetite. When the meal was over, the man led Frank into another room and filling his pipe asked him to sit down.

"We'd better have a talk," he said. "You can take the chair yonder."

Frank looked at him more closely when he sat down. Mr. Oliver, who was dressed in duck overalls, was rather spare in figure, though he looked wiry. His manner was quiet, and his voice was that of an educated man, but he had somewhat piercing gray eyes.

"I had a sincere regard for your father," he began. "On that account alone I should be glad to have you here; but first of all we had better understand each other. You mentioned that you had been in business in Minneapolis and afterward in Winnipeg. Didn't you like it?"

"No, sir," replied Frank, who felt that it would be wiser to answer carefully any questions this man might ask. "Still, that wasn't exactly why I gave it up, though" — and he hesitated — "to say I gave it up isn't quite correct."

"If I remember, you called it being fired, in your letter," Mr. Oliver suggested with a twinkle in his eyes. "What led up to that?"

"Slack trade in the last case. I'd like to think it was only the grudge a bullying clerk had against me in the other."

"Then, if you had been allowed, you would have stayed with the milling business, though you didn't care for it?"

"Yes," responded Frank. "Anyway, I'd have stayed until I could have got hold of something I liked better."

Mr. Oliver nodded in a way which suggested that he was pleased with the answer.

"Well," he said, "that brings us to the question why

you came out here. Was it because you had heard that it was a good country for hunting and fishing?"

Frank's face flushed. "No, sir," he replied, "I wanted to earn a living, and I understood that a" — he was going to say a live man, but thought better of it — "any one who wasn't too particular could generally come across something to do quickest in the West. In fact, I'd like to begin at once. After buying my ticket and getting odd meals I've only two or three dollars left."

"Two-fifty, to be precise. My sister took your clothes away to mend. Now, it's possible that I might manage to get you into the office of some lumber or general trading company in one of the cities. How would that do?"

"I'd rather go on to the land. I'd like to be a rancher."

"How much do you know about ranching?"

"Very little, but I could soon learn."

It was Frank's first blunder, and he realized it as he saw the gleam of amusement in Mr. Oliver's eyes.

"It's by no means certain," commented the latter. "There are men who can't learn to use the ax in a lifetime. We'll let it go at that, and say you're willing to learn. Have you any idea of making money by ranching?"

Frank thought a moment. "Well," he said finally, "I'd naturally wish to make some, but I don't think that counts for most with me. I'd rather have the kind of life I like."

"The trouble with a good many men is that when they get it they find out they like something else. Quite sure that hunting and fishing aren't taking too prominent a place in your mind? If they are, I'd better tell you that the favorite amusement in this country is chopping down big trees. There's another fact that you must consider. It takes a good deal of money to buy a ranch and, unless it's already cleared, you have to wait a long while before you get any of the money back. This

place cost me about nine thousand dollars, one way or another, and in all probability there's not a business on the Pacific Slope in which I wouldn't get twice as much as I'm getting here for the money, though I've been here a good many years. Now what do you expect to do with two dollars and a half?"

What he had heard had been somewhat of a shock to Frank, and the question was difficult to answer.

"I might earn a little more by degrees, sir," he said hopefully.

Mr. Oliver smiled at him encouragingly.

"It's possible; and there's cheaper land than mine, while a smart man used to the country can often get hold of a small contract of some kind. Now I'll tell you what we'll do. Wait a month, and then if you find that you like the life I'll hire you for what anybody else would give you."

With that he arose, signifying that the discussion was over, and Frank went out of doors and joined Harry in the clearing. The latter held a big handspike with an arched iron hook hinged to it, and he invited Frank to assist him in rolling logs.

"It will give you some idea how a ranch is cleared," he said. "To begin with, you had better take a look around."

Frank did so and first of all noticed the rather rambling house, part of which was built of logs notched into one another at the ends, though the rest, which had evidently been added to it later, was of sawed lumber. It was roofed with what he fancied were red cedar shingles. On the other side of it, carefully fenced off with tall split rails, stood orderly ranks of trees, some in delicate pink and white blossom. Harry told him they were apples and prunes and peaches. Nearer him were one or two fields of timothy grass and fresh green oats, and then more of the latter growing among fern-engirdled stumps sawed off some six feet above the ground. Beyond

them, in turn, half-burned branches were strewn among another stretch of stumps, then there was a narrow belt where great trees lately chopped lay in tremendous ruin, and behind them again the forest rose in an unbroken wall.

"Now," explained Harry, "you have the whole thing in front of you, if you'll begin at the bush and work back toward the house. First you chop down the trees, then you burn them up and raise your first crop or two round the stumps. Afterward by degrees you grub up the stumps and get the clean, tilled land. When it's been worked a few years it will grow almost anything."

"But where's the stock?" Frank asked. "I had a notion that a ranch was a place where you raised no end of horses or cattle."

"That's on the plains," laughed Harry. "On this side of the Rockies it's any piece of cleared land with a house on it. At quite a few of the ranches they raise nothing but fruit. As you asked the question, though, our cattle are in the bush. They run there and live on what they can find until we round them up. Now we'll get to work."

He turned away after a pair of brawny oxen that were plodding leisurely across the clearing, and in a little while they halted on the edge of what Harry called the slashing. This was a belt of fallen timber which ran around most of the open space. As Frank gazed at the chaos of great trunks and mighty branches he felt inclined to wonder how Mr. Oliver had managed to get them down.

"What will you do with these?" he asked.

"Saw or chop off the bigger branches," Harry answered. "Then we'll wait until the trunks are good and dry in the fall and put a fire to them. It will burn up all the small stuff, and leave them like this."

He pointed to the rows of blackened and partly burned logs which lay between the slashing and the half-cleared

soil, and Frank noticed that most of them had been sawed into several pieces.

"Couldn't you sell them for lumber?" he inquired.

"No," replied Harry. "For one thing, it's quite a long way to the nearest mill and we'd have to build a skidway for a mile or two down to the water. Besides, in a general way, it's only the redwood and red cedar that the mills have much use for."

Then he gave Frank a handspike that lay close by, and between them they prized up one end of a log so that he could slip a chain sling under it. The other end of the chain was attached to the yoke of the oxen, and when he called them the big white and red beasts hauled the log away until he stopped them and went back for another. Frank did not find much difficulty in this, but it was different when they had drawn six or seven of the logs together and laid them side by side. Harry said that the next lot must go on top of the others, and Frank was wondering how they were to get them there, when his companion laid two or three stout skids some distance apart against the first of the row. These, it was evident, would serve as short, slanting bridges, but Frank was still not clear as to how the next log could be propelled up them.

When Harry brought it up he slipped the chain along toward its middle, though it cost the boys an effort to prize the mass up with their handspikes, after which he made one end of the chain fast on the opposite side of the row, around which he led the oxen. The other end he hooked to their yoke, so that it now led doubled across the row and around the trunk they wished to raise. He said that when the chain was pulled the log would roll up it. He next shouted to the oxen, who plodded forward straining at the yoke, while he and Frank slipped their handspikes under opposite ends of the log.

"Heave!" he cried. "Send her up!"

Frank did his utmost, with the perspiration dripping

from him and the veins on his forehead swelling, but the ponderous mass rolled very slowly up the skids, and several times he fancied it would drag the oxen backward and slide down on him. Indeed, for about half a minute it hung stationary, though Harry, who dared not draw out his handspike, shouted frantic encouragement to the straining beasts. Then it moved another inch or two, and one released skid shot up as though fired out of a gun when the log rolled upon the first of the preceding ones. They worked it well across them, and then freeing the chain went back for another, though Frank's arms felt as if they had been almost pulled out of their sockets.

"You want somebody to keep the oxen up to it as well as two to heave, when the logs are as big as these," said his companion. "Still, some of the small ranchers do the whole thing alone."

Frank could not help wondering what kind of men these were, but in the meanwhile he was obliged to bend all his thought on his difficult task, which grew heavier when, having ranged the logs in two layers, they commenced the third. The skids were now too short to reach the top of the second tier without making the slope rather steep and Harry said that they must cut some new ones. A couple of axes lay close by, and handing one to Frank he strode into the bush and stopped in front of a young fir.

"The butt ought to make a skid," he said. "I'll leave you to get it down and I'll look for another. You do it like this."

Spreading his feet apart and balancing himself lightly, he swung the heavy, long-hafted ax above his head. The big blade, descending, buried itself in the trunk, and rose with a flash when he wrenched it clear. This time he struck horizontally and a neat wedge-shaped chip flew out.

"Now," he said, handing the ax to Frank, "you can go ahead."

He turned away and Frank swung the ax experimentally once or twice. The thing looked easy. Whirling up the blade, he struck with all his might. It came down into the notch Harry had made, but it was the flat of it that struck, and, while the haft jarred his hands, the blade glanced and just missed his leg. This appeared somewhat extraordinary, and he was a little more cautious when he tried again. He hit the tree fairly this time, but almost a foot above the cut, and he was commencing to feel indignant when he dragged the steel out again, which in itself was not particularly easy. He then struck horizontally, but the blade did not seem to go in at all, and at the next attempt the ax buried itself in the soil, just grazing his boot. This steadied him, for he had no desire to lame himself for life. Shortening his hold upon the haft, he used it after the manner of a domestic chopper, until at length, when his hands were blistered and he was very hot, the tree went down with a crash. Then turning around he saw Harry watching him with a look of amusement.

"Have you got yours down?" Frank asked.

"Oh, yes," Harry replied, "and another. I've chopped them through for skids." He pointed to the hacked and splintered log. "Looks as if something had been eating it, doesn't it?"

Frank's face grew rather red. "You couldn't expect me to drop into it all at once. Give me a week or two to pick up the swing and balance of it."

"A week or two!" Harry seemed to address the clustering firs. "They sure raise smart folks back East."

"How long were you learning?" retorted Frank.

"Well," said Harry thoughtfully, "you could call it most of twelve years. I used to go whittling with a toy tomahawk soon after I could walk. Of course, they

confiscated the thing now and then. Once it was after I'd just brought down a one-leg round table."

"Did you ever cut yourself?"

Harry rolled up his trousers and pointed to a big white mark below his knee.

"I could show you two or three more of them," he commented dryly. "There are quite a few bush ranchers who haven't got all their toes on."

He cut a skid from the butt of the log, and when they went back to the pile the work which before had been hard now became more or less dangerous. They had to prize and sometimes shoulder up the ponderous masses of timber three-high, and Frank was far from feeling over the effects of the previous two-days' march. Still, if his companion could manage it, he was determined that he could, and he toiled on, soaked in perspiration, straining and gasping over one of the heaviest tasks connected with clearing land, until to his vast relief Miss Oliver appeared in the doorway, jingling a cowbell as a signal that dinner was ready.

They went back to work after the meal, and Frank somehow held out until the middle of the afternoon. It seemed very hot in the clearing and the scorching sunrays beat down upon the back of his neck and shoulders. One of his horribly blistered hands commenced to bleed, he was almost afraid to straighten his back, and his arms were sore all over. At last as they were heaving up a heavy log it stuck just on the edge of the tier and Frank, who felt his breath failing him and his heart beating as though it would burst, could hear the oxen scuffling furiously on the other side of the pile.

"Heave!" Harry shouted. "Another inch will land her!"

"I can't!" Frank panted, with his hands slipping upon the lever.

"Then look out!" warned Harry. "Let go of the thing and jump!"

Frank did not remember whether he let go or whether the handspike was torn from his grasp, but he jumped backward as far as he could and staggered a few paces farther when he saw the big log rolling down after him. Then he fell headlong, there was a crash and a great trampling of hoofs, and he wondered whether the log would crush the life out of him. When he scrambled to his feet, however, it had stopped not far away; and in a few moments Harry appeared from behind the pile.

"It pulled the oxen backward right up to the logs," he explained. Then he looked sharply at Frank. "We haven't done badly for one day, and Aunt Sophy wants me to haul in some stovewood. You sit there and rest yourself awhile."

He went away with the oxen, and Frank was thankful to do as he was told, for his heart was heavy and he was utterly worn out. His hands were torn and blistered and the logs that he had partly lifted with his body had bruised his breast and ribs. If this was ranching, it was horrible work, and he felt that he would break down altogether if he attempted much more of it. It was nothing like his dream of riding through the bush on spirited horses after half-wild cattle. Then the troublesome question as to what he should do if he gave it up had to be faced. He had found that he had no aptitude for business, and he had a suspicion that work would be quite as hard in a logging camp or in a saw-mill. It was clear that he could not go home, even if he had the money for his fare, which was not the case, and he felt very forlorn and miserable.

In the meanwhile the twigs he lay upon were pleasantly soft, and it was cool and peaceful in the lengthening shadow of the firs. There was a curious rhythmic drumming sound which he found most soothing and which he afterward learned was made by a blue grouse not far away. The pungent smell of withering fir and cedar sprays in the slashing dulled his senses, until at last his

troubles seemed to melt away and he fancied that he was back in Boston where nobody had ever required him to heave ponderous logs upon one another.

It was a couple of hours later when Mr. Oliver, walking back that way with Harry, stopped and looked at the pile.

"You have put all those up since this morning?" he asked.

Harry said that they had done so, and Mr. Oliver glanced down with a little smile at Frank, who lay fast asleep.

"It's rather more than I expected. The lad must have done his share, but it might have been better if you had started him at something easier."

"He stood it all right until a while ago, and I think he'd have seen me through if it hadn't been for the walk yesterday. Shall we crosscut some of those branches to-morrow instead?"

"No," replied Mr. Oliver after a moment's reflection. "It might be wiser to let him see the worst of it. If he stands a week's logging there's no doubt that he'll do." He paused a moment and looked down at Frank again. "I don't think he'll back down on it. He's very much like his father, as I remember him a good many years ago."

Then he laid his hand on Frank's shoulder.

"Get up, boy. Supper's ready."

CHAPTER IV

TARGET PRACTICE

THE two boys spent most of the following week rolling logs and they were busy among them one hot afternoon when Mr. Oliver walked out of the bush nearby. As they did not immediately see him, he stopped and stood watching them in the shadow for a few minutes. Frank was feeling more cheerful by this time, though his hands were still very sore and, as a good many of the logs were burned on the outside, he was more or less blackened all over. He was getting used to the work, and Jake, who had arrived with the sloop in the meanwhile, relieved him and his companion of the heaviest part of it. Turning around presently at a sound, Frank saw Mr. Oliver smiling at him.

"If I were as grimy as you I think I'd go in for a swim," he said. "It's hot enough, and there's a nice beach not far away. I dare say Harry will go along with you while Jake and I put up these logs."

Harry lost no time in throwing down his handspike, and they set out together down a narrow trail through the woods, which led them out by and by upon a head above the cove in which the sloop lay moored. Standing on the edge of the crag, Frank looked down upon the clear, green water which lapped smooth as oil upon a belt of milk-white shingle and broke into little wisps of foam beneath the gray rocks at the mouth of the cove. Beyond this the sea flashed silver in the sunlight like a great mirror, except where a faint, fitful breeze traced dark blue streaks across it. Dim smudges of islands and headlands broke the gleaming surface here

and there, and high above it all was a cold white gleam of eternal snow.

In a few minutes they had scrambled down a winding path, and Frank, stripping off his clothes, waded into the water abreast of the sloop which lay swinging gently about a dozen yards from the beach.

"Can you swim off to her?" shouted Harry.

Frank said that he thought he could, and set about it with a jerky breast stroke, for he was not very proficient in the art. The water was decidedly cold and he was glad when he reached the sloop. Clutching her rail where it was lowest amidships he endeavored to pull himself out. To his disgust he found that his feet would shoot forward under the bottom of her, with the result that he sank back to the neck after each effort. When he had made two or three attempts he heard a shout:

"Hold on! You'll never do it that way."

Harry shot toward him, his limbs gleaming curiously white through the shining green water, though his face and neck showed a coffee-brown, as did his lower arms, which he swung out above his head, rolling from side to side at every stroke. He grasped Frank's shoulder and pushed him toward the stern of the sloop.

"Now," he said when he clutched it, "there are just two ways of getting out of the water into a boat. If she has a flat stern you make for there and get your hands on the top of it spread a little apart. Then you heave yourself up by a handspring — though that isn't very easy."

Frank smiled at these instructions, but said nothing. It was easy for him, because he had learned the trick in a gymnasium. Suddenly jerking down his elbows, which ever since he had grasped the stern were as high as his head, he shot his body up until his hands were down at his hips. Then, as his waist was level with the sloop's

transom, he quietly crawled on board. Harry, however, had to make two or three attempts before he succeeded, and then he looked at his companion with undisguised astonishment.

"I've never done it right away yet," he said admiringly. "Say, do you know how to dive?"

"No," replied Frank; "that is, I've scarcely tried."

Harry led him forward where the boat's sheer was higher and he could stand a couple of feet or so above the water.

"You only get half the fun out of swimming unless you can dive," he said. "Let's see what kind of a show you make."

Frank stiffened himself and jumped. At least, that was what he meant to do, but as it happened, he merely threw himself flat upon the water, and the result was rather disconcerting. He felt as though all the breath had been knocked out of him, and in addition to this all the front of his body was smarting. He was about to swim toward the stern again when Harry stopped him.

"Hold on!" he called. "You may as well learn the other way of getting out, and if she's a sailing craft with a bowsprit it's much the easiest one. Swim forward to the bow."

Frank did so and saw that a wire ran from the end of the bowsprit, dipping a little below the water where it was attached to the boat. He had no difficulty in getting his foot upon it, and after that it was a simple matter to crawl on board. His chest and limbs were still smarting and were very red when he joined Harry. The latter regarded him with a look of amusement.

"You'll get hurt every time, if you dive like that," he said. "Look here," and he stood up on the boat's deck. "You want to get your weight on the fore part of your feet all ready to shove off before you go. Then you must shoot as far forward as you can — falling on

it won't do — and hollow your back and stiffen yourself once you're under. That is, when you want to skim along just below the surface. Watch me."

Leaning forward a little he sprang out from the boat, a lithe, tense figure, with hands flung straight forward over his head. They struck the water first, and he went in with an impetus which swept him along scarcely a foot beneath the top. Then his speed slowly slackened and he had stopped altogether about a length of the boat away when he raised his head and swam back to her.

"You don't want to try that in less than four feet until you're sure you can do it right," he said when he had climbed on board. "The other kind of diving's different." Then, taking up a galvanized pin, he threw it in. "See whether you can fetch it. There's about eight or nine feet of water here. You can open your eyes as soon as your head's in, and you won't have any trouble in coming up again. Jump, and throw your legs straight up as you go."

Frank managed this time not to drop in a heap as he had done before. He also opened his eyes under water for the first time and found it perfectly easy to see. It was like looking through green glass. He could make out the pin lying a long way down beneath him. It was, however, impossible to reach it. The water seemed determined on forcing him back to the top, and when he abandoned the struggle to get down he seemed to reach the surface with a bound.

"How far did I go?" he gasped.

"About six feet. It's quite as far as I expected."

Harry plunged, and Frank, who had climbed out in the meanwhile, saw him striking upward with his feet until he turned and came up with a rush, holding the pin in one hand. Flinging it on board he headed for the beach and was standing on the shingle rubbing himself with his hands when Frank joined him.

"I guess you had two towels when you went swimming back East?" he laughed.

Frank looked up inquiringly, acknowledging that he usually had taken one.

"Well," said Harry, "we have them at the homestead, but there are ranches in this country where you wouldn't get even one."

"No towels!" exclaimed Frank in some astonishment. "What do they use instead?"

"Some of them cut a very little bit off of a cotton flour bag. Those bags are valuable because they keep them to mend their shirts with. I've a notion that the other fellows sit in the sun."

Frank laughed and scrambled into his clothes after rubbing himself with his hands. He was commencing to realize that whether Harry was joking with him or not it was unavoidable that they should have different ways in different parts of so big a country. Indeed, now that he was some four thousand miles from Boston, he felt that instead of its being curious that the people were slightly different it was wonderful that they were so much the same. If one measured four thousand miles across Europe and Asia one would get Frenchmen at the one end and wild Cossacks or nomad Tartars at the other, with perhaps a score of wholly different nations, speaking different languages, between.

They had an excellent appetite for supper when they went back to the ranch, and after the meal was over, Mr. Oliver took down a rifle from the wall.

"You can bring yours along, Harry," he said, and then turned to Frank. "In a general way, a rancher doesn't get much time for hunting, and he seldom goes out for the fun of the thing, but an odd deer or grouse comes in handy now and then. Anyway, before you can hunt at all you must learn to shoot and you may as well begin."

"Dad's a pot-hunter," chuckled Harry. "At least,

that's what the two smart sports we had round here last fall said he was."

A gleam of amusement crept into his aunt's eyes, but Mr. Oliver's face contracted into a slight frown.

"Harry knows my views, but you had better hear them, too," he said to Frank. "I'm certainly what those fellows called a pot-hunter, though they very foolishly seemed to think that one ought to be ashamed of it. Most of the ranchers in this district take down the rifle only when they want something to eat, and that's the best excuse there is for shooting. Is it a desirable thing to destroy a dozen harmless beasts for the mere pleasure of killing, and leave them in the bush for the wolves and eagles?"

"Don't the game laws prevent that, sir?" Frank asked.

"They limit a man to so many head of this and that, and in a general way he brings no more out with him, but it doesn't by any means follow that he hasn't killed a bear or a deer that he doesn't mention in some lonely ravine. The sport who hasn't a conscience is as big a pest in a game country as the horn and hide hunter used to be, and we have to thank him for practically exterminating several of the finest beasts in North America."

"Wouldn't the clearing of virgin country and the way the farms and ranches spring up account for it?"

"Only to some extent. It's my opinion that there are more deer and bears about the smaller ranches than you could find anywhere else. All this is no reason why you shouldn't learn to shoot; that is, to hit your game just where you want to and kill it there and then."

He walked out with his rifle and the boys followed him across the clearing. Here Harry fixed a piece of white paper about two feet square with a black dab in the middle of it on the trunk of a big fir, after which he came back to where the others were standing.

"How far do you make it?" his father asked.

"About a hundred yards."

Mr. Oliver now turned to Frank.

"As I think you told me you couldn't shoot, I'll give you a short lecture on the principles of the thing. When they're after birds most men use a scatter gun. It will spread an ounce of shot—several hundred pellets—over a six-foot circle at a distance of about forty yards; but the rifle is the great weapon of western America. Take this one and open the breach—now look up the barrel."

"I can see little grooves twisting round it like a screw," said Frank.

"That's the rifling. It serves two purposes. The bullet—you use only one—has to screw round and round to get out, and that gives the explosion time to act upon it. It increases the muzzle velocity. Then it gives the bullet a rotary motion, and anything spinning on its axis travels very much straighter than it would do otherwise. It's the twisting motion that keeps a top from falling over."

Frank could readily understand this, and he remembered what he had read about the gyroscope.

"Now," continued Mr. Oliver, "we have to consider the pull of the earth upon the bullet, which would bring it down, and to counteract this you have to direct it rather upward. The slight curve it makes before it reaches its mark is called the trajectory, and it naturally varies with the distance. You arrange it by the sights. There are two of them, one on the muzzle and one near the breach. The last one slides up and down like this. The farther off the mark is the higher it must go. As you have to get them both in line, it's evident that pushing the back one up will raise the muzzle. You can understand that?"

Frank said that he could, and Mr. Oliver pushed the rearsight down and snapped a lever.

"It's cocked, though it hasn't a shell in it. At a hundred yards or less the sight goes down about the limit." He handed Frank the rifle. "Stand straight, left foot a little to the left and forward—that will do. Now bring the rifle to your shoulder—left hand under the barrel near the rearsight, elbow well down, right hand round the small of the butt, thumb on the top. Try to hold it steady."

Frank found it difficult. The rifle was heavy and the muzzle seemed to want to drop, but Mr. Oliver stopped him when he let his left elbow fall in toward his side.

"Bring it down and wait a moment before you throw it up again," he advised.

Frank did so once or twice, and at length his instructor seemed satisfied.

"Now we'll aim," he said. "Drop your left cheek on the stock—you'd better shut your left eye. Try to see the target through the hollow of the rearsight, with the front one right in the middle of it."

It seemed singularly difficult. The square of paper now looked exceedingly small and the sights would wobble across it. After several attempts, however, Frank got them comparatively steady.

"Put your forefinger on the trigger," Mr. Oliver directed. "Don't pull, but squeeze it slowly and steadily, holding your breath in the meanwhile."

This was worst of all, for Frank found that he pulled the sight off the target when he tightened his forefinger. After he had made an attempt or two, Mr. Oliver told him to put the rifle down.

"See what you can do, Harry," he said.

"Standing?"

"Yes," said Mr. Oliver, turning to Frank again. "Standing's hardest, kneeling easier, and lying down easiest of all, but when you're hunting in thick bush you generally have to stand."

Harry slipped a shell into his rifle, and pitched it to his shoulder. It wobbled for a moment and then grew still. After that there was a spitting of red sparks from the muzzle, which suddenly jerked, followed by a sharp detonation. A second or two later there was a thud, and Harry laughed as he stood gazing at the mark while a little blue smoke curled out of the muzzle and the opened breach.

"It's well up on the left top corner," he said.

Frank was blankly astonished. He could certainly see the square of paper, but it seemed impossible that anybody could tell whether there was a mark on it. As a matter of fact, very few people who had not been taught how to use their eyes could have done so.

Then Mr. Oliver took up his rifle, and Frank noticed that his whole body and limbs seemed to fall into the best position for holding it steady without any visible effort on the man's part. The blue barrel did not seem to move at all until at length it jerked, and Harry grinned exultantly at Frank when a thin streak of smoke drifted past them.

"That's the pot-hunter's way. He's about two inches off the center."

Mr. Oliver gave Frank the rifle, and this time he slipped in a shell.

"If you can't get the sights right bring it down," he directed. "Don't dwell too long on your aim."

Frank held his breath and stiffened his muscles, but the foresight would wobble and the target seemed to dance up and down in a most exasperating manner. At length he pressed the trigger. He felt a sharp jar upon his shoulder, but to his astonishment he heard no report. After what seemed quite a long time there was a faint thud in the forest.

"You've got something, but I guess it's the wrong tree," laughed Harry.

After that Frank tried several shots, finally succeed-

ing in hitting the tree a couple of feet above the mark. Mr. Oliver, who had taken out his pipe in the meanwhile, nodded at him encouragingly.

"You only need to practice steadily," he said. "For the rest, anything that tends toward a healthy life will make you shoot well. Whisky and tobacco most certainly won't."

Harry's eyes twinkled as he glanced at his father's pipe.

"One of them hasn't much effect on him. I don't know whether I told you about the bag the two sports who were round here last fall nearly made. I got the tale from Webster on the next ranch."

Frank said that he would like to hear it, and Harry laughed.

"Well," he began, "Webster was sitting on a log in the bush just outside his slashing, looking around kind of sorrowful at the trees. It seemed to him they looked so big and nice it would be a pity to spoil them. When I've been chopping until my hands are sore I sometimes feel like that."

"It doesn't lead to riches," interrupted his father dryly.

"By and by," Harry continued, "Webster heard a smashing in the underbrush. It kept coming nearer, but it wasn't in the least like the sound a bear makes or a jumping deer. You don't know they're around unless they're badly scared. Anyway, Webster sat still wondering what it could be, until he saw a man crawling on the ground. He was coming along very cautiously, but you couldn't have heard him more than half a mile away. By and by he disappeared behind a big tree, and as there hadn't been a deer about for a week Webster wondered if the man was mad, until there was a blaze of repeater firing in the bush. Then Fremont, his logging ox, came out of it like a locomotive and headed for the range so fast that Webster couldn't see how he went.

He grabbed his logging handspike, and found a sport abusing another for missing in the bush.

" 'What in the name of wonder are you after?' he asked.

" 'We've been trailing a deer two hours,' one of them declared. 'A mighty big deer. Must have been an elk.'

" 'An elk, sure. I saw it,' added the other.

" 'There isn't a blamed elk in the country,' said Webster.

" 'You'll see,' persisted the other. 'I tell you I pumped the cylinder full into him.'

" 'Quite sure of that?' Webster asked.

" The other man said that he was, and Webster waved his handspike.

" 'Then it's going to cost you sixty dollars, and I'll take a deposit now,' he said. 'It's my ox Fremont you've been after.' "

" Did they give it to him? " Frank broke in.

" Five dollars," Harry answered. " Webster looked big and savage, and they compromised on that."

" But had they hit the ox? "

Harry chuckled. " Give a man who isn't a hunter a repeater and he'll never hit anything — unless it's what he isn't shooting at."

" Anyway, it's better to stick to the single shot at first," Mr. Oliver remarked. " Then you take time and care, and it's more likely that when you shoot you kill. No humane person has any use for the man who leaves badly wounded beasts wandering about the woods."

He rose, and shook out his pipe.

" We'll be getting back," he added. " There's only one way of making it easy to rise at sun-up."

They walked toward the house together, and it seemed to Frank that there was a good deal to be said for this rancher's views. He did not tell tall stories and boast of what he had shot, but Frank had seen enough to

realize that it was most unlikely that he left any sorely wounded animal to die in misery. It was not often that Mr. Oliver molested the beautiful wild creatures of the woods, but when he fixed the sights on one of them he killed it clean.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERIOUS SCHOONER

THREE or four weeks slipped by uneventfully, and Frank was commencing to like the simple, laborious life at the ranch. He and Harry were standing together one evening on the shingle down in the cove. It was close upon high water and a long swell worked in, breaking noisily upon the pebbles, while they could see the blue undulations burst into snowy froth about the dark rocks at the entrance. The sun had just dipped; it was wonderfully fresh and cool, and a sweet resinous smell drifted out of the forest behind them.

Harry glanced at a canoe which lay close by. It was about fourteen feet long and just wide enough to sit in, and had been hollowed out of a cedar log by a Siwash Indian. The bow, which swept sharply upward, had been rudely cut into the likeness of a bird's head. The craft was kept there so that anybody who wished to reach the sloop could go off in her.

"I don't think it's quite high water yet, and the breeze is dropping," Harry was saying. "There's just enough to take us a mile or two down the beach over the tide with the spritsail set. Then we could lower the mast and paddle home."

"Wouldn't she sail back?" Ray asked.

"No," was the answer, "only with a fair wind. You can't beat a thing like that to windward. There's not enough of her in the water."

Frank said that he would like to go, and after running the canoe down they lifted the short mast into place and set the little sail. It filled when a few strokes of the

paddle had driven them out of the cove, and they slid away, rising and falling smoothly, with the swell running after them. Harry took hold of the rope that held the foot of the sail fast to a peg.

"You want to keep the sheet handy in a very small craft," he instructed. "Then if a hard puff of wind strikes her you can slack it up, or let it go altogether, when the sail will blow out loose. There's more weight in this breeze than I expected."

It seemed to Frank from the gurgle at the bows and the way the foam slipped by them that they were sailing very fast, but for a while he watched the rocky heads that dipped to the water open out one after another and then close in again behind them. The woods that crept between them down to the strips of shingle were rapidly growing shadowy, and the ridges of water that followed them seemed to be getting darker, though here and there one of them was flecked with bright wisps of froth. At length Harry let the sheet go and brought the canoe around.

"We'll have the mast down and get back," he said.

They had no trouble in rolling up the sail and laying the mast in the bottom of the craft, but when they dipped the paddles, Harry kneeling in the stern and Frank toward the bow, the latter realized that their next task would not be quite so easy. A chilly wind which seemed considerably stronger than before they turned struck his face, the bows splashed noisily, throwing up little spurts of spray, and now and then the narrow craft lurched rather wildly over the top of a swell. He worked hard for about twenty minutes, and then glancing astern was a little astonished to see that a rock which had been opposite them was now a remarkably small distance behind. Harry, who had evidently followed his glance, scowled disapprovingly.

"We'll have to paddle, that's a cold fact," he declared. "The tide seems to have turned quite a while before it

ought to have, and the breeze is getting up again. We might find slacker water right inshore."

They edged close in to the rocks, the sight of which did not add to Frank's comfort, though the boat crept on a little faster. The swell broke in long white swirls about their feet, and it was evident that any attempt to land there was out of the question. Besides, even if they managed to reach the bush, there was no trail to the ranch, and he had no desire to struggle through the tangle of fallen branches and dense thickets in the darkness. His knees and hands were getting sore, but he toiled on patiently with the single-ended paddle, while the canoe lurched more viciously and little showers of spray flew in over her bow. It was becoming exceedingly hard work to drive the craft into the rising head sea. The foam-girt rocks were, however, slowly crawling by, and at length, after laboring, panting and breathless, around a somewhat larger head, Harry suddenly stopped paddling.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "Just keep her from swinging, and look yonder!"

Frank, glad of a brief rest, gazed astern. It was neither light nor dark, for a pale moon hung low in the sky, casting a faint silvery track upon the water, which was now flecked with white froth a little off shore. Across the sweep of radiance there moved a tall black spire of slanting canvas, with the foam leaping up about the shadowy strip of hull beneath.

"The schooner!" said Harry significantly. "She's beating up over the tide and she'll probably stand close in, but I don't think they could see us against the land."

He spoke as if he did not wish to be seen, and for no very clear reason Frank felt glad that they lay in the shadow of a big black head. The schooner was coming on very fast, rising, it seemed to him, bodily, until he could make out the curl of piled-up water that flowed away beneath her depressed side. The mass of strain-

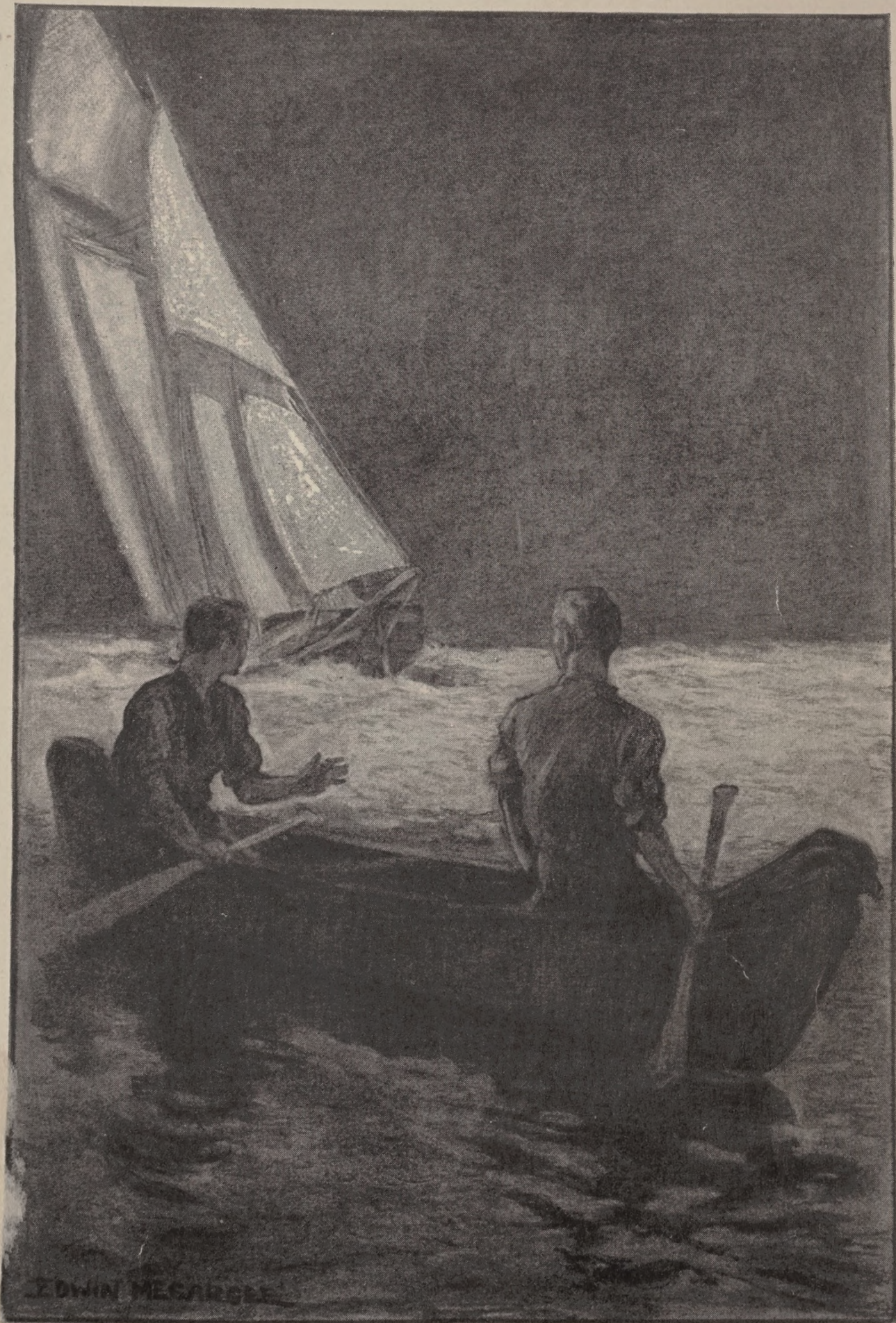
ing sailcloth hid most of her slanted deck, and he could see nobody on board her, but it seemed curious that she carried no lights. Then it occurred to him that she was heading straight for them, and he was about to dip his paddle when Harry stopped him.

"Keep still!" he commanded. "They'll have to come round before they reach us."

Frank could now hear the roar of water about the bow of the vessel, and in a minute or two she swayed suddenly upright and there was a great thrashing of canvas as, shooting forward, she came round. She was very near them and as her boom-foresail and main-sail swung across, leaving clear the side of the deck they had shrouded, he saw two or three shadowy figures busy forward. They became more distinct as she drove back into the moonlight, which fell upon the form of her helmsman. Frank could see him clearly, and there was, he fancied, something peculiar about the man.

The splashing top of a sea slopped into the canoe as they got way on her, and they taxed their strength to the utmost during the next hour. The craft bucked and jumped as they laboriously drove her over the confused swell, which was rapidly getting higher, and there was already a good deal of water washing about inside her. Once or twice Frank held his breath as a threatening mass of water heaved up ahead, but in each case she lurched across it safely, and presently they found smoother water under another crag. He gave a sigh of relief when at length they reached the cove and beached her upon the shingle. They turned her over to empty before they ran her up, and then Harry sat down upon a boulder. Frank already had discovered that he seldom talked of anything they had done as though it were an exploit.

"I'm quite puzzled about that schooner," he said presently.



“IT SEEMED CURIOUS THAT SHE CARRIED NO LIGHTS”—Page 54

“Why?”

Harry paused and thought a moment. “Well, it’s a sure thing she’s the vessel that crept past us the morning we were lying beneath the point, and though she’s been seen three or four times now there’s no notice in the papers of any arrival that seems to fit her. She has the look of being built for the Canadian sealing trade, and most of the craft in that business are mighty smart vessels.”

“Doesn’t a ship have to carry papers saying where she’s from and where she’s going?”

“Oh, yes,” assented Harry. “Still, she might clear from somewhere in Canada, say for the halibut fishing—I’ve heard they’re trying to start it there—or something that would keep her out a month or so. Then, as there is no end of quiet inlets in British Columbia and a good many here, she could run up and down from one to another and go back with a few fish, and there’d be nothing to show what she had been doing in the meanwhile.”

“You think it’s something illegal?”

“If it is anything honest I don’t see why she was beating up without her lights in the strength of the tide, when she’d have slacker water over toward the other side, only there’d be a chance of her being seen from the Seattle boat if she ran across yonder. Now it’s a general idea that there’s a good deal of dope—that’s opium—smuggled into this country, and now and then Chinamen, too. Our people won’t have any more of them, but though they have no trouble in getting into Canada, they seem to like the States better. I guess wages are higher.”

“Have you talked to your father about it?”

“I told him what we’d seen the other time and he looked kind of amused, or as if he didn’t want to be bothered about the thing; though that may not have been it, either. Unless he tells you right out, you can

never figure on what he's thinking. Anyway, I'll say nothing more to him unless there's some particular reason."

Harry was afterward sorry that he had arrived at this decision, and, for that matter, so was his father, but it was the next morning before this came about. In the meanwhile the boys went back to the ranch, and soon afterward retired to rest in the room they now shared. Frank went to sleep at once, and it was some time later when, awaking suddenly, he fancied that Harry had left his bed, which was fixed against the opposite wall. A faint light from outside crept into the room, and Frank made out a black figure standing by the open window. Slipping softly to the floor he moved toward it and Harry raised his hand warningly when he joined him.

"What are you doing here?" Frank inquired.

"Well," answered Harry, "since you ask me, I don't quite know, but I fancied I heard somebody about the ranch. Keep still and listen."

He spoke in a low and rather strained voice, and Frank, who was uneasily impressed by it, leaned out of the window. There was a moon somewhere in the sky, but it was obscured by clouds, and only a dim, uncertain light filtered down. It showed the great black firs which rose, a rampart of impenetrable darkness, beyond the rather less shadowy clearing, across part of which the fruit trees stretched. Then ran back, in regular rows, little clumps of deeper obscurity which presently grew blurred and faded into one another. The wind had apparently dropped again, for it was impressively still.

"I can't hear anything," whispered Frank.

"I'm not sure that I did," rejoined Harry. "It may be that seeing that schooner put the thing into my head, but we'll wait a little now that we're up."

For a couple of minutes they waited in silence. Then Harry suddenly gripped his companion's arm.

"Look!" he whispered. "Across the clearing — yonder!"

Frank fancied that he could make out a shadowy object in the open space between the fruit trees and the forest. It was very dim and indistinct, and he realized that he would not have noticed it only that it moved. Shortly afterward it disappeared and a faint rattle like that made by two pieces of wood jarring together came out of the deep gloom beneath the firs.

"The fence," suggested Harry. "It sounded like the top rails going down."

The fence was made of split rails interlocked together in the usual manner without the use of nails, and it seemed to Frank very probable that anybody climbing over it in the darkness would be apt to knock one or two of them down. The question was who would be likely to climb over it, since there was no one living within some miles of the ranch. Then he caught another sound which seemed farther off. It suggested the crackle of rotten branches or torn-down undergrowth, but it ceased almost immediately.

"Slip on your things," whispered Harry. "I'm going down."

In a few moments they crept softly down the stairway barefooted, and Harry opened the outer door very cautiously. He picked up an ax outside, and they moved silently around the house, stopping now and then to listen. There was only a deep stillness. Nothing seemed to move; though Frank wished that he had at least a good thick stick in his hand. He had an uncomfortable feeling that they might come upon a man hiding in some strip of deeper gloom as they slowly crept along the wall. When at length they had satisfied themselves that there was nobody about, Harry sat down.

"I can't figure out this thing," he mused. "It seems to me that whoever those strangers were they haven't been near the house, and it's a quiet country, anyway." He glanced down at his bare feet. "I'd go along and look around the barn and stables only that I'd certainly stub my toes, and it wouldn't be any use. Nobody steals horses around here. They couldn't get rid of them if they did."

The outbuildings stood at some little distance from the house, and Frank, who remembered that they had strewn the trail to them with broken twigs in dragging some branches from the slashing, agreed with his companion that it would not be wise to traverse it in the darkness with unprotected feet.

"Couldn't you slip into the kitchen and get our boots?" he suggested.

"Not without waking dad," answered Harry. "He's in the next room, and he sleeps lightly. I'm not anxious to bring him out if no harm's been done."

"He'd get angry?"

"No, he'd only smile; and somehow that makes you feel quite cheap and small. Besides"—and he hesitated—"there was another time, when I roused them for nothing; and I don't want to do it again. You wouldn't either, if you had stood as much about it from Jake as I've had to ever since."

They decided to say nothing about the matter unless some reason for doing so appeared in the morning, and creeping back through the house as silently as possible they went to bed. They awoke a little later than usual, and going down found Mr. Oliver standing at one side of the kitchen table rather grave of face, with Jake, who also looked thoughtful, opposite him. A strip of paper with some writing on it lay between them. Mr. Oliver looked around as the boys came in.

"Did either of you hear anything suspicious last night?" he asked.

"Yes," said Harry hesitatingly. "In fact, we came down."

He briefly related why they had done so, and Jake broke in:

"Then why in the name of wonder didn't you call somebody?"

"It's a reasonable question," said Mr. Oliver.

Harry explained with some diffidence that they were afraid of being laughed at, and Frank felt a little uncomfortable under the rancher's steady gaze.

"Well," said the latter dryly, "I suppose your idea was natural, and we'll let it go at that. It's perhaps scarcely worth while to point out that most people get laughed at now and then, and there's no reason for believing that it hurts them. I wonder if you will be surprised to hear that my team has gone?"

They were certainly somewhat startled.

"I found this stuck up on the stable door," said Jake, pushing the strip of paper across toward them.

The boys read the straggling writing: "*If you want your team back keep your mouth shut.*"

For a moment they looked at each other in silence, and then Mr. Oliver turned to them.

"It's all we know in the meanwhile. Have you anything more to tell us?"

Harry diffidently mentioned the schooner, and his father drew down his brows.

"Whether her appearance has any connection with the matter is more than I can say, but I'll sail up to the settlement this morning. You and Frank can go on with the drain cutting while I am away."

Just then Miss Oliver came in to get breakfast ready, and when the meal was finished the two boys made for the clearing where they were cutting a trench. When they reached their destination Harry sat down and pushed back his hat.

"This thing isn't very clear to me, but I'm beginning

to get the drift of it," he announced. "It's quite likely that dad knows a good deal more about it than I do, but until he has it all worked out he won't tell. First of all, we'll allow that they're smugglers on that schooner. They borrowed two of our horses and that fixes it."

"You couldn't smuggle a great deal on two horses," Frank pointed out.

"Sure," admitted Harry. "Still, they might have picked up another team somewhere else, and you want to remember that it only pays to smuggle things that are valuable and can be easily moved. Now one packhorse load of dope would be worth a good many dollars, and you can't move anything much easier than a man. He's got feet."

This was incontestable, but Frank considered the matter.

"If you turned a number of Chinamen loose in the bush wouldn't they be recognized as strangers at any settlement they reached and have to give an account of themselves to somebody?"

"The trouble is that, although I believe they have to carry papers of some kind, it's mighty hard to tell one Chinaman from another and they all work into each other's hands."

"Your idea is that the smugglers have confederates?"

"They have them, sure," said Harry. "There's some diking being done on a salt marsh not far away, and the last time I was there it struck me there were some hard-looking white toughs on the workings. Then there's a small Chinese colony behind the settlement, and it's thick bush with only a few ranches for some leagues beyond. Just the kind of country for running dope through."

"Are the ranchers likely to stand in?"

"No, not in a general way, but it's possible that a man here and there living by himself in the bush would

say nothing if they borrowed a horse or two. It's not nice to have a gang of toughs up against you."

"Your father doesn't seem inclined to look at it that way."

Harry laughed. "I'll allow that there's a good deal of sense in dad. It would be clear to him that he couldn't well give them away afterward if he did nothing this time. They'd certainly have got him; and dad's not the man to let a gang of dope runners order him round." He paused a moment, and added significantly: "If they try any bluffing in this case there'll be trouble."

Frank asked no further questions and they set about the trenching.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE HELM

MR. OLIVER did not come back until nightfall. He said nothing about his visit to the settlement and several days passed before the boys heard anything further of the matter. In the meanwhile they went on with the drain they were cutting across a swampy strip of clearing, and one afternoon they stood in the bottom of the four-foot trench. Harry was then busy with a grubhoe, cutting through the roots and breaking up the wet soil, which his companion flung out with a long-handled shovel. It was unpleasantly hot, and the flies were troublesome. Frank's hands were too muddy to brush them away and they crawled about his face and into his ears. He had already decided that draining was about the last occupation he would have chosen for a scorching afternoon, had the choice been open to him.

He stood, stripped to shirt and trousers, in about a foot of water, and because he had not learned the trick of pitching out the soil, part of every shovelful fell back upon him. His shirt was spattered all over, and patches of sticky mire glued it to his skin. There was no doubt that ranching was considerably less romantic than he had supposed it to be, and logging and ditching struck him as particularly uninteresting and somewhat barbarous work, but he was beginning to realize that all the agricultural prosperity of his country was founded on toil of a very similar kind. The wheat and the fruit trees would not grow until man with patient labor had prepared the soil for them, and, what was more significant, Mr. Oliver had made it plain that their yield

varied in direct proportion with the work bestowed on them. Nature's alchemy, it seemed, could transmute the effort of straining muscle into golden sheaves, glowing-tinted apples, and velvet-skinned peaches and prunes.

It was clear to Frank that if he meant to become a rancher he must make up his mind to face a good many unpleasant tasks, and he swung up the mire shovelful by shovelful, though his back and limbs were aching and he had to work in a horribly cramped position. He was young, and though there were times when the work seemed almost too much for him, it was consoling to feel when he laid down his tools at night that he was growing harder and tougher with every day's toil, for his muscles were now beginning to obey instead of mastering him. He could go on for several hours after they commenced to ache, without its costing him any great effort.

By and by, however, there was an interruption, and Frank was by no means sorry when Mr. Oliver came up with a stranger and called them out of the trench.

"This is Mr. Barclay whose business is connected with the collection of the United States revenue," he said. "I believe he would like a little talk with you."

He walked away and left them with the stranger, who sat down on a log and took out a cigar. He was a little man and rather stout, dressed carelessly in store clothes, with a big soft hat and a white shirt which bulged up above the opening in his half-buttoned vest. It occurred to Frank that he looked like a country doctor. From out rather bushy eyebrows shone a pair of whimsical, twinkling eyes. When he had lighted his cigar he indicated the trench with a large, plump hand.

"Been making all that hole yourselves?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Harry.

"Interesting work?"

"That depends on how you look at it," said Harry flippantly. "Would you like to try?"

Mr. Barclay waved his hand. "It isn't necessary. Did something of the same kind years ago — only, if I remember, it was rather wetter."

"Where was that?" Harry inquired with an air of languid politeness, at which Frank felt inclined to chuckle.

"Place called Forks Butte Creek. It was a twenty-foot trench."

Harry seemed astonished and his manner suddenly changed.

"You were with the boys at Forks Butte when they swung the creek?"

"Sure," assented Mr. Barclay with a laugh. "I didn't expect you'd have heard of it. You certainly weren't ranching then."

"I've heard of it lots of times," declared Harry, turning excitedly to Frank. "It was one of the biggest things ever done by a few men this side of the Cascades. The old-timers talk about it yet. A mining row — there were about a dozen of them working some alluvial claims on a disputed location. I don't know the whole of it, but the thing turned upon the frontage, and they stood off a swarm of jumpers while they shifted the creek."

"Something like that," said Mr. Barclay. "In those days they interpreted the mining laws with a certain amount of sentiment, which — and in some respects it's a pity — they don't do now." He paused and flicked the ash from his cigar. "I understand you have been seeing a mysterious schooner."

His tone was sufficiently ironical to put Harry on his mettle, and he furnished a full and particular account of the vessel. When he had finished Mr. Barclay glanced at him with amusement in his eyes.

"You have an idea there might be smugglers on board of her?" he suggested.

"It's more than an idea. I'm sure."

"I wonder if you could tell me why?"

It was rather difficult to answer, but Harry made the attempt, furnishing his questioner with half a dozen reasons which did not seem to have much effect on him.

"Well," he persisted, "you're convinced she had opium and Chinamen on board her?"

"Aren't you?"

Mr. Barclay looked up with a smile. "At the present moment I can't form an opinion. After all, it's possible."

He rose, and as he was strolling away toward the house Harry's face contracted into an indignant frown.

"That man must have been cooking, or something of the kind, at Forks Butte," he broke out contemptuously. "Anyway, it was the last time he ever did anything worth talking about. Did you ever run up against such a stuffed image?"

Frank was far from certain that this description was altogether applicable to the stranger, but Harry seemed so much annoyed that he did not express his opinion, and they got down into the trench again. When they went back to the ranch an hour later they heard that Mr. Oliver and Mr. Barclay had gone to a neighboring ranch and intended to make a journey into the bush if they could borrow horses. When the boys were eating breakfast the next morning Miss Oliver turned to Harry.

"We have run out of pork, and the flour is almost gone," she said. "I meant to ask your father to bring some when he went up to the settlement, but I forgot it, and Jake must bring in those steers to-day."

"We'll go," broke in Harry quickly. "There's a nice sailing breeze."

His aunt looked doubtful. "You have never been so far with the sloop unless Jake was with you; and isn't there a nasty tide-rip somewhere? Still, I don't know what I shall do unless I get the flour."

She yielded when Harry insisted; and shortly afterward the boys paddled off to the sloop and made the

canoe fast astern. They set the big gaff mainsail and Harry sculled her out of the cove before he hoisted the jib. Then he made Frank take the helm.

"It's a head wind until we're round the point yonder, but you'll have to learn to sail her sometime," he said. "The first thing to remember is that she'll only lie up at an angle to the wind and if you make it too small she won't go through the water. You want to feel a slight strain on the tiller."

He hauled the sheets in until the boom hung just over the boat's quarter, and while Frank grasped the tiller she slid out into open water. Bright sunshine smote the little tumbling green ridges that had here and there crests of snowy foam, and she bounded over them with a spray cloud flying at her bows. She seemed to be making an excellent pace, but Harry shook his head.

"No," he objected, "you're letting her fall off. That is, the angle you're sailing her at is too big. She'll go faster that way, but she won't go so far to windward. Don't pull so much on your tiller and she'll come up closer."

Frank tried it, but the boat sailed more slowly, and presently her mainsail flapped.

"Now you're too close," warned Harry. "You're trying to head her right into the wind. Pull your helm up again."

Frank did so, and when the boat gathered speed he ventured a question.

"If you keep her too close to the wind she won't sail, and if you let her fall off she's not going where you want. How do you find out the exact angle she ought to make?"

Harry laughed. "It depends on the boat, the cut of her sails, and how smart you are at the helm. One man would shove her to windward a point closer than another could and keep her sailing faster, too. It's a

thing that takes time to learn, and there are men you couldn't teach to sail a boat at all."

Frank found that it became easier by degrees, though his companion did not appear altogether satisfied. The sloop had dipped her lee rail just level with the water now, and she rushed along, bounding with a lurch and splash over the small froth-tipped seas. He began to understand how one arrived at the proper angle by the slant at which the wind struck his face as well as by watching the direction of the seas which came charging down to meet her in regular formation. Then Harry said that as they had stretched out far enough to clear the point they would go about upon the other tack.

"Shove your helm down—that's to lee—not too hard!" he ordered, and as Frank obeyed him there was a sharp banging of sail cloth and the boat, swinging around, swayed upright.

In another moment the wind was on her opposite side, and she was heading off at an angle to her previous course, while Harry with one foot braced against the lee coaming struggled to flatten in the sheet on the jib. The big mainboom had swung over of its own accord amidst a great clatter of blocks. By and by when the point slid away to lee of them Harry told Frank to pull his helm up, and then he pointed to a confused mass of gray rocks and trees rising above the glistening water several miles away.

"Now," he said, "she'll go there straight, and all you have to do is to keep her bowsprit on yonder head. It's a fair wind, and when you've got that you want to slack out the sheets until the sails are as far outboard as they'll go and still keep full. If your sheets are too tight, you'll know it by the weight on the tiller."

He let a couple of ropes run out through the clattering blocks, and the sloop, slanting over a little farther, seemed to leap forward. The sparkling green ridges which came tumbling up on one side of her swung her

aloft with the foam boiling along the edge of her lee deck, and then surged away in turn and let her drop while another came rolling up. Instead of being a mere thing of wood and canvas she seemed to become animate, charged with vitality. The springy way she rushed along was strangely exhilarating. Frank became fascinated watching her bows go up and the snowy, straining sail sweep across the dazzling blue at every lurch, while he became conscious of a sense of control and mastery as he gripped the tiller. He felt that he could do what he wanted with this wonderful rushing thing.

For she was certainly wonderful. There was no doubt of that, because among all of man's works and inventions there is none that more nearly approaches the simplicity of perfection and adaptability to its purpose than the modern sailboat. It has taken centuries to evolve her, each builder adding a little to the work of those who went before, and balancing in her making, often without knowing it, the great natural forces one against another, until at last science justified what man did, so that with this frail creation one may brave the untrammelled winds of heaven and the onslaught of the seas.

By and by the headland they had been nearing thrust them off their course, and outside it lay a nest of islets, with a strong stream running up between. As it ran to windward it broke up the regular, breeze-driven waves into short, foaming combers with hollowed breasts and tumbling tops which flung up wisps of spray. Frank glanced at this tumult with some anxiety, and it was a relief to him when his companion offered to take the tiller.

"You had better let me have her," Harry said. "She wants handling in a jump like that. I'd heave a reef down to reduce the sail, only that it would take us some time to tie it in and there'll be smoother water once we're past the islands. As we'll have to beat through, you can get the sheets in."

Frank found this no easy task, for he had no idea that the sails could pull so hard, and Harry had to help him with one hand. Then the latter's face became intent as they plunged into the turmoil. The seas looked big and angry now. In fact, as usually happens, they looked a good deal bigger than they really were, but they were breaking in a threatening manner and came on to meet the sloop in white-topped phalanxes. She went over some with a disconcerting plunge and swoop, but she rammed a few of the rest, driving her jib and bows in and flinging the brine all over her when she swung them up. Her deck was sluicing, and every now and then a green and white cascade came frothing over the coaming into the well. Frank, however, noticed that, instead of letting the boat meet the combers, his companion occasionally pulled his tiller up, so that, swinging round a little, she brought the ridge of frothing water farther on her side as she plunged over it.

"I thought you had to face a nasty sea head-on," he said.

"Did you?" Harry responded. "Then watch that smaller one."

A slope of water came tumbling on some yards ahead, and as the boy eased his helm down an inch or two the bows came up to meet the sea. They struck it full in its hollowed breast, and the next moment there was a shock and half the deck was lost in a rush of foam.

"Like me to plug another?" laughed Harry.

Frank begged him not to do it. The result of the experiment was rather alarming, and Harry let her fall off a little to dodge the onslaught of the succeeding combers, until at last they grew smaller as the stream spread itself out in open water. Then he gave Frank some further instruction.

"If you were pulling or paddling a small craft it would be safer to bring her head-on, because you have to remember that she'd be going mighty slow, but when

you're sailing a boat that's carrying her speed it's evident that you don't want to ram her right at a comber. If you do, she's bound to go bang into it. When you see one that looks threatening you let her fall off slightly and she goes over slanting." He broke off for a moment with a laugh. "Seems to me I'm always on the 'teach.' You come here and take the tiller while I get some of the water out of her. You can head for that point to starboard."

He busied himself with the bucket while Frank steered the boat, and an hour or so later they ran into a little sheltered inlet where they brought her head to wind and pitched the anchor over. After that they bailed out the half-swamped canoe, and, dropping into her, paddled ashore.

CHAPTER VII

A WARNING

FRANK looked about him with some curiosity when they reached the settlement, which struck him as a singularly unattractive place. In a hole chopped out of the forest that crept close to the edge of the water stood a few small log houses and several roughly boarded shacks. Tall fir stumps surrounded them, and here and there provision cans and old boots lay among the fern, in which a few lean hogs were rooting. Farther on, however, there was an opening in the bush, for the boy could catch the gleam of water between the trees, and in one place the great columnar trunks cut against the soft green of a meadow. The grass was bright with sunshine, but dim shadow hung over the forest-shrouded settlement.

"A forlorn spot," said Harry. "I don't know why the folks first pitched here, but they raise a little fruit, and now and then a Seattle boat comes along. It's thin gravel soil on this strip, and that's probably the reason they haven't done any more chopping—there are salt meadows farther along—but if they'd any hustlers among them they'd have got out their axes and let a little daylight in." He waved his hand contemptuously. "They're a mean crowd, anyway, except the storekeeper, and I've wondered how he makes a living out of them. Now we'll go along and get that flour."

They moved on down the trail, which was torn up by the passage of jumper sledges, until they reached a frame building which Frank had not noticed at first. It stood back a little and was larger and neater than

any of the rest. A veranda ran along the front of it and in one window small flour bags and more provision cans were displayed. A couple of men in blue shirts and overalls lounged smoking on the veranda in a manner which suggested that they had never hurried themselves in their lives, and they seemed to be the only inhabitants of the place. As the boys walked up the stairway Harry pointed to a notice pasted up in the window. Frank stopped and read it aloud.

"Twenty dollars will be paid to any one identifying the man who recently drove a pair of horses off the Oliver ranch."

With a laugh Harry looked up defiantly at the lounging men. "That's Oliver's answer," he said. "They told him to keep his mouth shut."

One of the men grinned. "Seems to me it was good advice. Do you figure any one round here is going to earn those twenty dollars?"

Harry shook his head. "I don't," he answered. "Still, my only reason for believing it is that the money isn't big enough. Anyway, that notice will serve its purpose. It makes it clear that we mean to fight."

The loungee grinned again and Harry, marching past him with his head up, entered the store. A man who was sitting behind the counter rose when the boys came in and raised his hand in a manner which seemed to indicate that caution was desirable.

"You're wanting some groceries?" he asked.

"Flour," Harry answered. "A seventy-pound bag, if you've got it. Some pork, too—you know the piece we take. You might send them down to the beach, if there's anybody in the place who's not afraid of carrying a flour bag."

The storekeeper smiled and strolled casually toward the window. Coming back he leaned upon the counter.

"Your aunt's mighty particular about her pork," he

said, raising his voice a little. "Better come along into the back store and see what I've got."

They followed him into a smaller room, where he first of all threw several big slabs of pork down upon a board, making, it seemed to Frank, as much noise as possible.

"Twelve pounds in this lot," he said loudly, then lowering his voice: "Those fellows outside haven't gone and I don't want them to hear. You haven't found your horses yet?"

Harry admitted that they had not done so, and the man nodded gravely.

"Well," he said, "I guess they'll turn up presently. I couldn't tell your father that because there were other folks in the store when he handed me the notice. What I want to say is that he's not wise in bluffing the boys. You had better tell him that's my opinion."

"How much do you know about the thing?" Harry asked directly.

"Very little, but I can guess a good deal. Quite enough, anyway, to convince me that you folks had better lie quiet, and let the boys alone."

Harry glanced scornfully toward the veranda.

"Pshaw!" he growled. "We don't want to meddle, but it's another matter to let those slouches drive off our team. That's my view, though I don't know what my father means to do about it. He hasn't told me."

"He never does tell folks," the storekeeper answered with a trace of dryness. "I guess he'll wait, and kick when he's ready, but you tell him from me that he's up against quite a big thing." He raised his voice: "Well, I'll send that pork and flour along."

The boys went out and met one of the loungers strolling casually across the store, though Frank had a suspicion that he had come in softly some time earlier. As they were walking down to the beach Harry glanced up the strip of sheltered water.

"There's a Chinese camp a little way up the creek," he said. "Nothing much to see there, but we may as well take a look at it."

They paddled across a strip of shadow where the reflections of spreading cedar and towering fir floated inverted in the still, green water until the ripple from the bows broke across and banished them. After that they slid out into the sunlight where a narrow belt of cultivated land ran back on either hand. On one side it was partly hidden by a bank of soil, at the end of which three or four men were leisurely working. They merely looked down as the canoe slid past.

"Hard cases!" said Harry presently. "If I was sheriff I'd clean this hole right out. There are decent folks here, but the curious thing is that when you let two or three toughs into a place they seem to get on top."

Frank made no comment, and soon they were once more paddling into the shadow of the forest. The creek was growing smaller, and at length they ran the canoe ashore and struck into a narrow trail through the bush.

It was now getting on into the afternoon and Frank felt sorry that they had not eaten the lunch Miss Oliver had prepared for them before they left the sloop. It was very hot, and very still, except when now and then the drumming of a blue grouse came sharply out of the shadows. By and by, however, the wood became a little thinner, and Harry pointed toward an opening between the trees.

"That's the place," he said. "Not much to look at, but it's good land. You can see the maples yonder—that's always a favorable sign—and somebody with money has lately bought quite a piece of it to start a fruit ranch on. The Chows have taken the contract for clearing it, and if any dope has been landed in the neighborhood they're probably mixed up with the thing."

Frank glanced toward the opening, and sitting, as he

was, in dim shadow, the open space he looked out upon seemed flooded with dazzling brightness. In the background, and some distance away, little, blue-clad figures were toiling with axes that flashed as they swung amidst a confusion of branches and fallen logs, the staccato chunk of the blades ripping through the heavy stillness. Nothing else, however, seemed to move, and the air was filled with a languorous, resinous smell. Rows of stumps stretched out from the spot on which the Chinamen were working, breaking off before a cluster of bark and split-board shacks that stood beneath the edge of the forest. A man dressed in loose, blue garments was seated motionless outside one of the shacks, before two logs, from between which a little smoke curled straight up into the air. Presently the man stood up, and just then Harry seized Frank's shoulder.

"Look round a little — to the left," he whispered.

Frank did so and was astonished to see another man slip quietly out of the forest and approach the shack. His face was not discernible, but there was something peculiar in the way he walked, and his dress made it evident that he was a white man.

"Have you seen him before?" Harry asked softly.

"I can't locate him, but I've an idea that he's not quite a stranger," said Frank.

"Well," said Harry, "I'm open to make a guess at him. Just as the schooner went about that night I had a look at her helmsman. He had his back to me, but it was moonlight, and I could see that one shoulder hunched up in a kind of curious manner."

Frank looked again and it seemed to him that there was something unusual in the way the man held his shoulder. It was somewhat higher than the other, though it hardly amounted to a deformity.

"Slip in behind that tree," whispered Harry, pointing toward the bush. "We'll creep up through the shadow if he goes into the shack."

They spent some minutes moving forward in and out among the trees, and in the meanwhile Frank saw the stranger enter the shack and the Chinaman follow him. Then he and Harry walked out of the bush scarcely a score of yards from the rude building, and headed straight for it. As they approached, the Chinaman became visible in the doorway, where he stood waiting for them. He appeared to be an old man, for his face was lined and seamed, but it was absolutely expressionless, an impassive yellow mask, and Frank felt baffled and repelled by it. As soon as it was evident that the boys intended to enter his dwelling, he moved aside, and when they stood in the little, shadowy room Frank was astonished to see that there was nobody else in it. This seemed incomprehensible, for there was only one door in the place. In the meanwhile the Chinaman was looking at them quietly.

"It's quite hot," observed Harry.

"Velly hot," assented the other, who did not seem in any way disturbed by the fact that they had so uncereemoniously marched in.

Harry appeared embarrassed after this, as though he did not know what to say next, until he was evidently seized by an inspiration.

"Got any chow, John?" he asked.

"Velly good chow," answered the Chinaman. "Lice, blue glouse, smokee fishee."

"Blue grouse!" said Harry disgustedly aside to Frank. "It's the nesting season, but I guess that wouldn't count for much with them." He turned to his host. "I'm not a heathen. Savvy cook American? Got any flour you can make biscuits or flapjacks of?"

"You leavee chow to me," said the other. "Cooke all same big hotel Seattle, Tacoma, San F'lisco."

"It's quite likely," said Harry, looking round at Frank. "You can trust a Chinaman to turn out a decent meal."

"I'll walk round a bit in the meanwhile; you can sit here and rest."

Frank did not particularly wish to rest, but he fancied that his companion had given him a hint, and while the Chinaman busied himself with his pots and pans he sat down outside the shack. He had been up early that morning, and after the steady, arduous work at the ranch it was pleasant to sit still in the strip of shadow and let his eyes wander idly about the clearing. Among other things, he noticed that a little trickle of water flowed across it, and that the soil was quaggy in the neighborhood. He concluded that the stranger, who had so mysteriously disappeared, must have crossed the wet place.

It was some little time before Harry came back and the Chinaman then set out their dinner. Frank had no idea what some of it consisted of and his companion was unable to enlighten him, but it was excellent. When they had finished, the man turned to Harry.

"One dolla," he said gravely.

Harry handed it over readily and smiled at Frank when they strolled back into the bush.

"It wasn't what I'd figured on when I first walked in, but I had to make some excuse," he said. "Just now I'd very much like to know how far it went with him." He paused and looked thoughtful. "I guess it wasn't a very long way. The image is ahead of us by a dollar."

Frank laughed. "You had some reason for going for that walk?"

"Oh, yes," replied Harry. "I wanted to make sure of things, and the ground was soft. There were some footprints in it—going from the shack—and they'd been made quite lately by a white man's boot. John sticks to his slipper things in a general way. Anyhow, it was the man we saw who left those tracks."

"How do you know that?"

"There were a lot of others about, but they'd been made earlier. The water had got into them, but there was very little in those I was interested in."

Frank was conscious that this was a point which would probably have escaped his notice, but he had not lived in the bush and learned to use his eyes.

"It's very curious how the fellow got out of the shack without our seeing him," he said.

"It looks curious until you begin to think. Now, though I tried to keep my eye on it all the while, the trees kept getting between me and the shack as we made for it, and what I couldn't see you couldn't see either. You were close behind me, which, in one way, was where we were wrong. If we had crept in well apart, the same tree wouldn't have bothered both of us, though if we'd done that it would have doubled the chances of our being seen."

"A tree isn't such a very big thing," Frank objected.

"No," said Harry. "The point is that it will shut an object a good deal bigger than itself out of your sight." He stopped a moment and pointed toward a neighboring cedar. "We'll say that one's three feet in diameter, but, as you're standing, it will shut off a good deal more than a track three feet wide through the bush. You want to run a line from your eye to both edges of the trunk and then carry them out behind it. The farther you run them, the farther they get apart, and as you can't see round a corner, everything in the wedge they enclose is shut out from view. Got that into you? It will come in useful when you're trailing a deer."

It was quite clear to Frank now that it had been explained, but his companion went on.

"Well," he added, "it wouldn't have taken that fellow more than a few seconds to slip out of the shack and in behind it. Then if he kept it between him and us he'd be hidden until he reached the bush."

"Yes," said Frank. "It must mean that he saw us, and didn't want us to see him."

"You're getting quite smart," said Harry with a grin. "I don't know if you noticed it, but you trod on a rotten branch that smashed. He didn't want us to know him again, but I'd pick that fellow anywhere by his back and walk. Now why was he so anxious that we shouldn't see him talking to the Chinaman?"

It was a suggestive question, but Frank could not answer it, and Harry said nothing further. Reaching the canoe they paddled down the creek until they came abreast of the sloop and saw the provisions lying upon the shingle some little distance from the water, for the tide had ebbed since their arrival. When they had run the canoe in Frank assisted Harry in getting the flour bag on his back, but gave a sudden cry of dismay as a white cloud flew all over him.

"Hold on!" he cried. "Put it down. It's running out!"

Harry dropped the bag and drew down his brows as he gazed at the little pile of flour which lay at his feet. Then he suddenly stooped down.

"The bag seemed a sound one," Frank suggested.

"Oh, yes," said Harry shortly. "There's only one thing the matter with it. See here," and he laid his finger on a long slit. "Somebody has stuck a knife into it."

"A mean trick!" Frank broke out wrathfully.

Harry stood up with a flash in his eyes. "It's rather more than that. It's a hint. Anyway, if you'll get hold of the other end we'll pack the bag down with the cut uppermost."

In spite of this precaution they spilled a good deal of the flour before they got it on board the sloop, but Harry said no more about the matter, and hoisting sail they slid out of the inlet with a faint breeze abeam of them. They

found it fair and the breeze only a little stronger when they had left the woods behind, and Frank sat at the tiller while the sloop glided rapidly through the smooth blue water with no more than a drowsy gurgle beneath her bows. The tide was running down with them now and it was only when he glanced toward the beach that he realized how fast they were going.

A pleasant salt odor of drying weed was mingled with the scent of the firs. In front of them a wonderful vista of white snow mountains emerged from fleecy cloud, and far beneath the silvery vapor appeared the faint and shadowy blurs of distant hillsides clothed with mighty forest. Overhead the big white sail swayed languidly to and fro, cutting sharply into the blue, and Frank felt that he would like to sail on like this for hours, lounging at the helm, and listening to the water as it slipped along the sides. With a light fair wind he could guide the boat wherever he wished by the slightest touch of the tiller, and it was pleasant to see how steadily he could keep her bowsprit pointing to a low rocky head that rose, a patch of soft blue shadow, against the evening light.

The voyage, however, came to an end almost too soon, and the rocks and firs were growing dim when they ran into the cove and picked up their mooring buoy. After they had stowed and covered the sails they went ashore, and both boys were very tired and warm when they reached the homestead. Harry's clothes were covered with flour, which had left a white trail along the way. Miss Oliver was standing in the lamplight when they came in and noticed the white patches on their clothes.

"You have let him give you a burst bag!" she exclaimed.

Harry looked meaningly at Frank. "No," he said, "I think it was all right when it left the store and I don't think we have spilled more than a few pounds.

Perhaps we had better skip it into the barrel. It will save the stuff from running out when you move it."

They managed to carry it away between them, and when they had emptied it Harry turned to Frank.

"If she starts talking about that bag, head her off on to something else," he said. "I don't want her to get imagining trouble every time we leave the ranch."

When Miss Oliver resumed the subject at supper Frank attempted to divert her attention, and fancied that he succeeded, though he wondered why she smiled at times. When the boys had gone to their room she picked up the bag and stretched it out under the light. Then her face grew grave as she saw the slit in it. Being a clever woman, however, she decided not to mention her suspicions.

CHAPTER VIII

SALMON SPEARING

WHEN the boys came in for breakfast next morning Jake was standing in the kitchen, and Miss Oliver sat opposite him looking unusually thoughtful.

"What's the matter?" Harry asked.

Jake turned toward him slowly.

"I don't know that there's anything very wrong," he said. "Leader's come back."

Leader was the name of one of the missing horses, and Frank started as he remembered what the storekeeper had said, but feeling Miss Oliver's eyes upon him, turned his head and looked out into the clearing.

"Where's Tillicum?" inquired Harry.

"That," replied Jake, "is more than I can tell. Leader was standing outside the stable when I went along and I can't make out why the other horse wasn't with him. He'd have come with Leader if anybody had turned them into the trail together."

Harry called to Frank and went out of the door. Jake followed them to the stable, where they found the horse looking rather jaded, but except for that very little the worse. Jake nodded reassuringly when Harry had felt him over.

"No sign of anything wrong," he said. "There was a good deal of dried mud on him before I fixed him up, and he seemed mighty keen on his corn. They hadn't given him very much."

"What do you make of it?" Harry asked.

"About as much as you do," answered Jake. "They turned him loose on the trail when they'd done with

him, and that's all there is to it. I guess the question is what they've done with Tillicum. One thing's certain. If he doesn't turn up, your father's going to be mighty mad."

Harry agreed that this would be very probable, though he did not think his father would show it. As there was nothing more to be said they went back to the house, where, somewhat to their relief, Miss Oliver made no allusion to the affair, and they proceeded quietly to eat breakfast.

"Are there any spring salmon in the river?" she asked presently, looking across at Harry.

"Yes," he responded, "there are a few coming up."

"Then you might take Frank with you this morning and try to get me one. I dare say Jake will smoke it." Miss Oliver smiled at Frank. "You don't get salmon prepared that way back East."

"We have it canned," said Frank. "I've an idea I've seen some smoked, but I can't remember. Is it very nice? I thought you didn't care for salmon here."

"Fresh salmon," Jake said curtly, "is only good for hogs, and if you keep it long enough, for growing potatoes with. Still," he added thoughtfully, "I don't know that you call it fresh then."

Miss Oliver laughed. "Wait until you try it smoked—as Jake does it. He can prepare it as some of the Siwash do. I believe they taught him in British Columbia."

Jake shook his head solemnly. "No," he said, "I can't cure salmon as some of the Indians do. You'd get nothing like it in a New York hotel, but I guess I can dress it 'most as well as any white man. You go along and get me a fish, Harry. I'd try the pool by the big fall."

They set out a few minutes later, taking with them a pole which had a big iron hook lashed to it and a long Indian salmon spear. There was a small fork at one

end of the latter on which were placed two nicely made bone barbs attached to the haft by strips of sinew. Harry removed them to show Frank that they would slip off their sockets easily. Leaving the clearing, they struck into a narrow trail through the bush, and after half an hour's scramble over fallen logs and through thick fern they reached the river.

It poured frothing out of shadowy forest and leaped over a rock ledge in a thundering fall, beneath which it swirled around a deep basin, and then after sweeping down a white rapid, spread out over a wide belt of stones. There were rocks on either side of it, and, as the trees could find no hold on them, warm sunlight streamed down upon the foaming water. Harry sat down on a ledge above the pool with the spear beside him and pointed to a great bird wheeling on slanted wings above the shallow.

"A fish eagle," he said. "Here are salmon making up."

Frank watched the circling of the majestic bird, which did not seem much afraid of them. It had a white head and a cruel beak, and once when it swept over him he noticed the fixed gaze of its cold, impassive eye. Splendid as it was, he somehow shrank from the thing. It looked so powerful and utterly merciless. When it stopped in the air, dropped, and struck, he saw a splash as a writhing, silvery creature was snatched up in its talons.

"Got him wrong!" cried Harry. "You watch. He'll have to let go again."

So far as Frank could see, the eagle had seized the salmon by the middle of its back, the fish twisting itself crossways as it was carried up into the air. The next moment there was a splash in the water and the bird swooped down again. When it rose it held its prey differently, and Frank fancied he could see one wicked claw gripping the fish close by the back of its neck, while the

other was spread out toward its tail. In any case, the salmon did not seem able to wriggle now, and the eagle flew off with it and vanished among the tops of the black firs.

"Not a big fish, but I've a notion the eagle could lift a thing as heavy as itself," said Harry. "They're mighty powerful. It might be the one he dropped, though I think it's another."

Frank had no idea how much an eagle weighed, but he realized something of the capabilities of a bird that could carry off this fish apparently without an effort, and, what was more astonishing, drag the tremendously muscular creature out of the water which was its home. Then his companion touched his shoulder.

"Watch those two fellows in the eddy," said he. "They're going to rush the fall."

Frank saw two slim shadows shoot out beneath a wreath of circling foam and flash—which seemed the best word for it—through the crystal depths of the slacker part of the pool. They were lost in the snowy turmoil near the foot of the fall, and a few minutes passed before he saw them again. Then one shot out of the water like a bow that had suddenly straightened itself, gleamed resplendent with silver, and plunged into the foam again. Harry pointed him out the other, and though it was a moment or two before he could see it he marveled when he did. It had its dusky back toward him, for now and then the dorsal fin rose clear, and it was swimming up a thin cascade which poured down a steep slope of stone. That any creature should have strength enough to stem that rush of water seemed incredible, but there was no doubt that the fish was ascending inch by inch. Then it found a momentary harbor in a little pool just outside the main leap of the fall, and shot out of it again with its curious uncurving spring. Frank watched it eagerly when it dropped into the fall, and it was with a sense of sympathy that he

saw its gallant efforts wasted as it was suddenly swept down. Before reaching the bottom, however, it had evidently rallied all its powers, for it flashed clear into the sunlight, and had recovered a fathom when he lost sight of it once more.

After that he glanced back toward the shallows and saw that other birds had appeared. He did not know what they were, and Harry could only tell him that they were fishhawks of some kind. As he watched them wheeling or stooping, dropping upon the sparkling stream, and screaming now and then, the boy began to form some idea of the desperate battle for existence that is fought daily and hourly by the lower creation.

"There don't seem to be a great many salmon," he remarked.

"It's a thin run," said Harry. "There'll probably be more of them in the next one. Once upon a time, as I expect you've heard, these rivers were so thick with fish that you could walk across their backs, though I'll allow I've never seen anything of that kind."

Frank was not astonished at the last admission. This brown-skinned, clear-eyed boy, who could sail a boat and hold the rifle straight, was not one to talk of the wonderful things he had seen and done. He left that to the whisky-faced sports of the saloons who were probably capable of butchering a crippled deer at fifty yards with the repeater.

"I suppose the salmon have plenty enemies," he suggested.

"Oh, yes," said Harry. "In the sea the seals and porpoises get their share of them. Then, as they head for the rivers, there are the fish traps, and in Canada the seine-net boats along the shore. After that when they're in fresh water they have to run the gauntlet of the Indians, birds, and bears."

"Bears?" Frank interrupted.

"Sure," said Harry. "They're quite smart fishers.

Even the little minks get some of the salmon stranded in the shallow pools. The Indians set long baskets, narrow end downward, for them near the top of the falls. These, of course, are fresh from salt-water—you can see they're silvery—but they lose that brightness as they go up the larger rivers, and on the Columbia and Fraser they push on hundreds of miles, up tremendous cañons, up falls and rapids, toward the Rockies. Those that fetch headwaters are scarred and battered, with the bright scales and most of their fins and tails worn right off them. Once they're through with the spawning they die."

"Then they go straight to the place where they spawn?"

"Yes, the salmon's really a seafish. It's born in fresh water, but it goes down to the ocean as soon as it's big enough, and it's generally believed that it stays there three or four years, though it's a fact that we know mighty little about the salmon yet. Then it comes back to the same place and spawns and dies. You see, there's a constant succession coming up." He broke off with a laugh. "Now we'll try to get one. There are three or four big fellows yonder. All you have to do is to slash at them with the hook."

Frank perched himself upon a jutting shelf of rock, and presently two or three swift shadows flitted by. He swung up the pole and made a sudden sweep at them, only to see the hook splash two or three feet behind the last one's tail. Incidentally, he came very near to going headforemost into the pool. Then another fish swept toward him, and this time he landed the hook some inches in front of its nose, after which he made several more attempts, succeeding only in splashing himself all over. He was beginning to discover that his hands and eyes needed a good deal of training. One, it seemed, must judge speed and distance and strike simultaneously, but the trouble was that he needed a second

or two to think, and, naturally, while he thought the fish got away.

By and by he turned and watched Harry, who had not struck once yet. He stood upon a ledge, alert, strung-up, and steady-eyed, but absolutely motionless, with the long spear running up above his shoulder. At last, however, he drove his right arm down and the beautiful, straight shaft sank into the pool. It stopped suddenly for a second, quivering, and then bent and twisted upward in the boy's clenched hands.

Frank ran toward him, wondering that the slender shaft did not immediately break, when he observed that one barb had slipped off its socket and that the fish, struck by it, was now held by the short length of sinew. A moment or two later Harry jerked it out upon the bank by a quick vertical movement and knocked it on the head. It lay still after this, a beautiful creature of some seven or eight pounds, with the sunlight gleaming on its silver scales. Frank glanced once more at the long spear. It occurred to him that this was also perfect in its way and could not have been better adapted to its purpose.

"It's curious that an Indian should be able to make a thing like that," he remarked. "I don't think a white man could turn out anything as handy, unless, of course, he had one to copy."

"The point is that it took the Siwash a mighty long while to make the salmon spear," said Harry. "It's quite likely they spent two hundred years over it. Their spears are all on the same pattern, so are their traps and canoes." Seeing a puzzled look cross Frank's face, he smiled. "An Indian is no smarter than a white man — in fact, when you stop to think of it, he's not half as smart, though most everything he makes is excellent. It's this way. If we want a saw for a new purpose or a different kind of wood, we write to the Disston people or somebody of the kind and they set their boss designer



to work. He considers, and then because he knows all about the physical sciences he draws the thing on paper and sends it to the forges or grinding shops. In a general way, that saw does its work, though I guess if the designer had to use it for a year or two he'd make the next one better."

"Of course," agreed Frank.

"It's different with the Indians," Harry continued. "One fellow made a fish spear ever so long ago and found that it wouldn't do. He made the next one different and was satisfied with it, but his son made it a little longer and thinner. Then his grandson altered the barb, and his son added another one. After that each fellow made it a little handier, until nothing more could be done to it, and they stuck to the pattern." He turned and glanced at the spear. "This thing is the product of the skill of ever so many generations."

It was simple but convincing, for it explained the efficiency of the Indian's tools, and also why he had not progressed. He worked along the same line, sticking to one simple implement until he had perfected it, and, though this was his greatest disadvantage, the man who killed the fish generally made the spear. He got so far and stopped, content, and incapable of going any farther. The white man, on the other hand, changed his methods continually with his changing needs and, what counted more than all, he very seldom made the tools he used, because he had discovered that somebody who did nothing else could make them better. When the Americans of the Pacific Slope wanted salmon they did not whittle spears, but sent east to the cordage factories, whose owners brought in fibers from all over the world and spun the netting with which to build gigantic fish traps.

"We could do with another fish," ventured Harry. "Let's see if you can get one."

Frank took up his pole again. It was a heavy and clumsy affair, but Harry had told him that he would

probably break the Indian spear. They waited awhile until another swift shadow swept around with the eddy beneath their feet.

"Hold on!" cried Harry. "Wait till the stream heads him and then strike as quick as you can."

The fish's speed was checked for a moment as it entered the furious rush beneath the fall, and Frank, who could just see its dusky back amidst the foam, swung his pole. There was a splash and then a curious shock which sent a thrill through him, and the haft jerked sharply in his hands.

"Heave him out!" cried Harry. "That thing won't break."

Frank tugged with all his might and the salmon flew up over his shoulder. The next moment he had seized it and was almost reluctant to let it go when his companion clubbed it on the head.

"Two's as many as we have any use for and we'll go along," said the latter. "We haven't made much of a show at that draining lately."

Frank would have preferred to stay where he was, but he followed Harry toward the bush, and soon after they struck a cleared trail to the ranch, which was, however, not the way they had come. A little later they were somewhat astonished to see a group of figures among the trees, and hurrying forward they found Mr. Oliver and Mr. Barclay talking to Jake, who apparently had been driving home two or three steers.

Mr. Oliver, looking unusually grave, nodded to the boys. "We have just met Jake," he said. "He tells me Tillicum's back a little way up the trail with a broken leg."

"I guess he's done," murmured Jake, adding significantly, "I wouldn't have left him like that if I'd had a gun."

"Go on with the steers," said Mr. Oliver. "We'll turn back."

The boys accompanied him and Mr. Barclay, and leaving the trail by and by where the bush was thinner they stopped before a pitiable sight. It was Tillicum who stood awkwardly before them, his head lowered and one leg that seemed distorted out of its usual shape hanging limp. Caked mire was spattered about the poor animal, its coat was foul, and every line of its body seemed expressive of pain and exhaustion. As it raised its drooping head and looked at them pitifully, Frank felt a thrill of hot anger against the outlaws who were responsible for its condition. Mr. Oliver stepped up to the horse and gently felt of its injured limb, after which he turned abruptly toward Mr. Barclay and Frank noticed that his face was set.

"There's only one thing to be done," he said. "Have you a pistol?"

"Haven't *you*?" his companion asked with a slight trace of astonishment in his tone.

"If I'd had one would I have wanted to borrow yours?" retorted Mr. Oliver.

"Well," said Mr. Barclay, "it's seldom I carry one, but in this case it seemed advisable." He put his hand into his pocket. "Here you are. It's a big caliber."

Mr. Oliver took the weapon and held it behind him, and turning back toward the horse, gently stroked its head. Then there was a flash and detonation, and the beast dropped like a stone. After a moment the rancher turned around with a very curious look in his eyes, with the smoking weapon clenched hard in his hand.

"I've had that faithful animal six years," he said in a harsh voice. "We'll get away."

They walked on in silence for a while, and then Mr. Barclay spoke.

"The breaking of its leg was probably an accident," he suggested.

"Yes," said Mr. Oliver. "It's possible he broke it after they turned him loose, but that doesn't seem to

affect the case." He paused and looked around at his companion. "You understand that I'm with you right through this thing."

Nothing more was said until they approached the ranch, when Mr. Oliver turned to the boys.

"I'll take the fish," he said. "You can go on with whatever you were doing."

They moved away toward the drain, and when they reached it Harry stood still a moment or two.

"It's a long while since I've seen dad look half so mad," he said. "When he sets his face that way it's sure to mean trouble. Anyway, when I saw Tillicum I felt kind of boiling over—as well as sorry."

"Did you notice what Mr. Barclay said about the pistol?" Frank asked.

"Why, of course," said Harry thoughtfully. "Now I don't know what they've been after, but it's plain enough that there was some danger in the thing. Mr. Barclay doesn't seem extra smart, but there's something in his look that suggests he wouldn't be easy scared, and he took a pistol along." Then he laughed in a significant manner and jumped down into the trench. "It's my idea those dope fellows are going to be sorry before dad gets through with them, and now we'll go on with the draining."

He fell to with the grubhoe and for the next half hour worked furiously, after which Jake appeared and called them in to dinner.

CHAPTER IX

A PLAIN HINT

MR. OLIVER bought another horse from one of his scattered neighbors, and a few days afterward he and Jake set off for an inlet along the coast near which a few ranchers lived. Harry explained to Frank that as they clubbed together and bought their supplies from Seattle a little steamer from the latter place called at the inlet now and then to deliver the goods, and his father had ordered a mower which was to be sent down by her.

Mr. Oliver did not come back until late in the evening a couple of days later, but as soon as he arrived he and Jake set to work to put the machine together, and it was getting dusk when at last they left it standing beneath the trees near the edge of a ravine. Early on the following morning the boys went back with them to see if it would work satisfactorily in cutting a little green timothy, but as they crossed the clearing Jake, who was leading the team a little distance in front of his companions, stopped suddenly.

"You didn't go back and move that machine after we left it?" he asked.

"No," replied Mr. Oliver. "What made you think I did?"

Jake looked at his employer rather curiously. "Well," he said, "somebody must have moved it. The thing's gone."

Mr. Oliver broke into a run and the rest followed. When they reached the clump of trees they could discover no sign of the mower, except for the track of

wheels among the withered needles and undergrowth. This led toward the ravine, at the bottom of which a little water flowed, and Frank saw Mr. Oliver's face harden as he followed this guide. A minute later they stood on the brink of the declivity and saw the mower lying upon its side among the stones thirty or forty feet below them. The slope was almost precipitous, but Mr. Oliver went down sliding amidst a rush of loosened soil, and Frank and Harry with some difficulty scrambled down after him. A glance was sufficient to show them that the implement was not likely to be of the least use to its owner. Mr. Oliver examined it quietly and then clambered back up the side of the ravine, after which he sat down and took out his pipe before he turned to Jake.

"Every bit of cast-iron in it is smashed," he said. "The pinion wheels are broken, and the other parts are bent. I'll have to order another one."

Jake made a gesture of sympathy.

"If I could get hold of the folks who did the thing it would be a consolation, but I haven't the least notion how to trail them."

"One man couldn't have moved it," said Mr. Oliver.

"There were three of them. The question is, what brought them here? I guess they didn't come just to smash the machine."

Mr. Oliver seemed lost a moment in contemplation.

"I think you're right," he said at length. "They probably came because this is the easiest way of getting through to the settlements in the Basker district and the beach behind the head makes a handy landing. We'll go along and look around. I don't think they'd try the cove. It's too near the house."

They turned into a bush trail together, and when they reached the beach a little while later Jake, stooping over a furrow in the smooth shingle by the water's edge, looked up at Mr. Oliver,

"A sea canoe grounded here soon after last high water," he said. "You can see where they ran her down when it had ebbed a little."

Mr. Oliver, who was still quietly smoking, nodded.

"Yes," he said, "it's very much as I expected. With a sheltered landing here and as good a trail inland as they could find, it's not difficult to understand why those fellows were anxious that I should stand in with them, or, at least, leave them alone. This thing, of course, was meant as a warning." Then he addressed the boys: "You needn't wait. You can get some more of those branches sawed off in the slashing."

They moved away and left him talking to Jake, and it was not until they had reached the bush that Harry made any observation.

"I've a notion that we're up against the meanest kind of toughs, but in the long run I'll back dad," he said. "It's quite likely that if we lie low you and I may get a hand in later on."

Frank made no answer, though the prospect his companion suggested was not unpleasant to him. Going back to their work they sawed up branches until night-fall. On the following afternoon they were still engaged at the same task at some distance from the house when they saw Jake, who had set out for a neighboring ranch in the morning, enter the clearing, dragging a big and evidently very unwilling animal after him. He sat down upon a log, and Harry dropped his ax.

"It's Webster's dog," he said to Frank. "I heard that somebody had given him one. We'll go along and look at him."

They found Jake rather breathless and very red in face, holding the end of a chain fastened to the collar of the dog, who crouched close by watching him with wicked eyes and white fangs bared. A serviceable club lay beside Jake, but it seemed to Frank that he had got as far away from the animal as the chain permitted.

The lad was, however, not astonished at this, for he fancied he had never seen as intractable and generally unprepossessing a dog as this one.

"Dad's borrowed him from Webster?" Harry suggested.

"It seemed to me Webster was mighty glad to get rid of him and didn't want him back," said Jake. "Guess if he was mine I wouldn't be anxious to keep him either."

Frank moved a pace or two nearer the dog, holding out his hand, but speedily retired when it growled at him savagely. After that Jake turned to Harry.

"You're fond of dogs," he suggested. "Wouldn't you like to pat him?"

"No," said Harry, edging away. "I wouldn't try it for five dollars. What kind of a brute is he?"

"Well," said Jake, "I figure that fellow has a considerable mixture of ancestors, though there's a strain of the bull in him. That's where he got his stylish mouth from. He's about as amiable as a timber-wolf, and he has the gait of a bear, while it's my opinion there's more sense in a plow ox than there is in him."

"When did you leave Webster's?" Harry next inquired.

"Soon as dinner was over," responded Jake dryly.

"And supper will be ready soon. What in the name of wonder have you been doing?" Harry looked around at Frank. "It's about three miles."

Jake grinned. "Coming along—and resting. This fellow kind of decided he'd sit down every now and then, and I let him. He's a dog that's been accustomed to doing just what he wants."

"Did you have to cross the creek?" asked Frank, who noticed that the man's long boots and part of his trousers were wet.

"No," said Jake curtly. "The critter took a notion he'd like to go in, and as I couldn't let him loose, I had

to go in, too. We splashed around in it for quite a few minutes."

Harry broke into a burst of laughter and Jake handed him the club. "I want to get in by supper. Suppose you put a move on him."

He stood up and jerked the chain, but the dog bared his teeth again and declined to stir. Harry, getting behind him, tapped him with the club, and he swung round savagely, straining at the chain.

"Now," said Jake, "I know how we'll fix him. You make him mad and then head for the ranch while he gets after you, and I'll try to hold him."

"No," said Harry decisively, "I don't think we'll try that way. Go on and lead him."

The animal moved off at last and shambled toward the house, looking bigger and considerably more clumsy than the largest bulldog Frank had ever seen. He walked into the kitchen docilely, but when Miss Oliver approached him Harry cried out in dismay.

"Keep away!" he warned. "He isn't safe."

"Loose the chain," said Miss Oliver, and to their vast astonishment the dog walked up to her, wagging his disreputable tail, and crouching down, licked her hands. She patted his great head gently and then turned smilingly to the boys.

"I'm afraid Webster has been rough with him," she said. "It's clear that he's a woman's dog."

"A woman's dog?" echoed Harry scathingly. "Well, the man who gave that beast to a woman must have been crazy."

During the next few days the dog made himself at home at the ranch, though with the exception of Miss Oliver he still eyed its inhabitants suspiciously. Jake said that though almost fully grown he was young and had no sense yet. Then the dog commenced to follow the boys about at a distance, and once fell upon and

destroyed their overall jackets which they had taken off when they went to work. They found him sitting upon the tatters, evidently feeling proud of himself, for he wagged his tail and barked delightedly when they approached. As a rule, he did not make much noise, but his growl was deep and ominous, with something in it that discouraged any attempt at undue familiarity.

While they were ruefully inspecting their ruined garments Jake came up and leaned against a neighboring tree.

"He wants training, Harry," he observed. "If he was my dog, I'd break him in."

"The question," retorted Harry indignantly, "is how it's to be done. I'll own up that I know very little about training dogs, and that's not the kind of one I'd like to begin on." He turned to Frank. "Considering that a good many of the ranchers live almost alone, it's rather a curious thing that there are very few dogs in this part of the country."

Jake fixed his eyes dubiously upon the animal, who trotted up a little nearer and growled at him.

"Well," he said, "he's sure a daisy, but I guess he can be taught, and the first thing is to let him see you're not afraid of him."

Harry snickered. "Then suppose you try to prove it. Haul him up by the ear and teach him he's not to eat my jacket."

Jake judiciously disregarded this suggestion. "There's one trick most dogs learn quite easy. It's to guard. You put down some of your clothes, for instance, and make him see that nobody's to touch them until you come back. Then he'll sit tight until you do, and I guess in this fellow's case there'd be mighty little wrong with the nerves of the man who'd put a hand on them."

"If it's to be clothes they'll have to be somebody else's," said Harry. "Anyway, I'll mention it to my

aunt. It's my opinion she's the only person who could teach him anything."

How Miss Oliver taught the dog they did not know, but she succeeded, for when the boys walked up to the house at supper time one evening a week or two later Harry, who reached the door first, came out hurriedly.

"The brute won't let me in," he explained. "I confess it sounds kind of silly, but perhaps you'd like to try."

Frank approached the door cautiously and stopped when he reached it. The dog crouched near the center of the kitchen floor, with a woman's straw hat in front of him from which there trailed a couple of chewed-up feathers. He looked up at Frank with a low, warning growl which said very plainly, "Come no farther!"

They called him endearing names, which, so far as they could see, had not the least effect, but neither of them felt equal to entering the kitchen until Miss Oliver walked in by another door. Then the dog let her take the hat, wagging his tail with satisfaction.

"He's a good deal more intelligent than you seem to think," she said. "Give him your hat, Harry, and then go out and wait for a few minutes before you come back for it."

Harry did so, and the dog made no trouble when he picked up the hat, but he would not let Frank go near it in the meanwhile. After that they tried two or three more experiments of the same kind, though Frank took no part in them, which was a thing he regretted when he went for a swim an evening or two later.

On this occasion the tide was almost full, the water in the cove was pleasantly warm and bright sunlight streamed down upon it, showing the white shingle a fathom beneath the surface. Now and then Frank went down toward it, for he had learned to swim under water and look about him while he did so, but by and by he

headed for the entrance to the cove with the overhand side stroke which Harry had taught him. Swinging his left arm forward over his head, his face dipped under and then rose in the midst of a ripple as his hollowed palm swept backward under his crooked elbow to his thigh, while his legs swung across each other like a pair of scissors. The brine gleamed and sparkled as it slipped past him, and when he reached the entrance to the cove he slid up and down the smooth, green undulations with a pleasant lift and fall. It was so exhilarating that he went farther than he had intended, and he was feeling a little breathless when at last he turned back, but when he reached the spot where he had undressed trouble awaited him.

The dog was seated upon his clothing, watching him with suspicious eyes, and it growled when he stood up knee-deep. Frank hesitated. The dog did not look amiable, but he was beginning to feel cold, and he walked slowly forward a pace or two. Then the creature raised itself on its forepaws, with white fangs bare, and once more broke into a deep, ominous growl. There was no doubt that it intended to guard his clothes.

He threw a piece of shingle at it and was glad on the whole that he had not succeeded in hitting it when it stood up with bristling hair and a most determined look in its eyes. Frank floundered back into the water, wondering uneasily if it was coming in after him, and then standing still up to his waist considered what he should do. It was evident that he could not stay where he was much longer, and the dog showed no sign of going away. It was equally impossible for him to walk back to the ranch without his clothes, and in the meanwhile he was growing unpleasantly chilly. Then he noticed that although the shadow of the crags above rested upon the spot where he stood the sunshine fell upon a boulder which rose out of the water not far away. Swimming to it he crawled out and found it a little

warmer there, but this brought him no nearer to finding a way out of the difficulty.

He did not remember how long he lay shivering upon the stone, but the shadow had crept across it and the tall firs above him showed up more blackly against the evening light, when at last Harry came clattering over the shingle and stopped in astonishment on seeing him.

"Whatever are you doing there?" he asked.

"Waiting until your dog goes home," said Frank. "He won't let me have my clothes. If you hadn't come I expect I'd have to stay here until to-morrow."

Harry couldn't help grinning when he observed the resolute animal. "Wouldn't it have been easier to come out and whack him off?"

"No," said Frank decidedly. "If you were in my place you wouldn't want to try."

Harry walked up to the creature and picked up the clothes, whereat it rose immediately and wagged its tail as though satisfied in having done its duty.

"He doesn't seem to mind me," Harry observed dryly. "Anyway, there's no reason why you shouldn't come out now unless, of course, you're happier where you are."

Frank swam across, dressed, and ran all the way to the ranch, but it was half an hour before he was moderately warm again. The next day he set about teaching the dog to guard. It occurred to him that it was not desirable that Harry and Miss Oliver should be the only ones to whom the animal would give any stray article of clothing he might come across.

A week or two later Miss Oliver went away on a visit to Tacoma, and Mr. Oliver, who had bought a new mower, commenced to cut his timothy hay. The machine could only work on the cleared land, and where the stumps were thick he set the boys to mow with the scythe. Frank found it troublesome work, for the big roots ran along the surface of the ground. The fern

had grown up among these roots, and it was their task to cut and pick it out from the grass, while every few minutes the scythe point struck a root and sometimes stuck in it. In places it struck gravel, which made dents in it, and the blade often got entangled among shooting willows and young fir saplings. Frank decided that while it was evidently a costly and difficult thing to clear a ranch, it must be almost as hard for its owner to keep what he had won, since the forest persistently crept back again.

"Suppose you left this place alone for a couple of years?" he asked, stopping to whet his dented scythe.

"You wouldn't know it again," Harry answered with a smile. "It would be a waste of willows, with young firs growing up between them. You couldn't tell it from the bush, only that the trees all round would be higher."

Frank dropped his scythe blade and leaned upon the haft. He had been mowing since sunrise, and the shadows were now rapidly lengthening. His back ached and his hands were sore, and he found it a relief to stand still a moment and look about him. On one side of the clearing the slanting sunrays struck deep into the forest, forcing up great columnar trunks out of the shadow. On the other, the fretted pinnacles of the firs cut sharp against the sky, and between stretched long swathes of fallen timothy and fern already turning yellow. Not far away, Mr. Oliver, sitting in the mower's saddle, was guiding his team along the edge of the grass which fell beneath the rasping knife, and the clink and rattle of the machine rang sharply through the still, evening air. Frank, stripped to blue shirt and trousers, found everything his eyes rested on pleasant, and he felt that, after all, he had done wisely when he left the cities.

Then he noticed Jake, who had been to the settlement, crossing the clearing with some letters in his hand. He gave them to Mr. Oliver, who pulled his team up and

sat still for some minutes reading them. After that he stepped out and walked toward the boys.

"You might take the team along, Harry, and put the kettle on the stove," he said. "We'll have supper as soon as it's ready."

Harry moved away and Mr. Oliver leaned against a neighboring stump with his eyes fixed thoughtfully on Frank.

"I've a letter from your mother," he said. "She wants to know if I'm satisfied with you." He paused a moment and added with a smile: "That's a question I think I can answer in the affirmative."

"Thank you, sir," said Frank.

"Then," Mr. Oliver continued, "she goes into one or two other matters on which she seems to want my opinion. In the first place, somebody has offered to find you an opening in the office of a Philadelphia business firm. You'll have to decide about it, and it seems to me that the choice is rather a big one. You see, if you stay out here ranching two or three years it will probably spoil you for a business life in the eastern cities."

Frank thought hard for a minute or two. There was no doubt that ranching, when it included clearing land, as it generally seemed to do, was remarkably arduous work. In the case of a man with little money it evidently meant almost incessant toil, for it was only by persistent effort that one could chop and saw up the great trees and grub the stumps out. Still, he was growing fond of it, and, what was more, he was conscious that he was gaining a resolution and muscular vigor that in all probability he would never have acquired in the crowded cities.

Finally he looked up. "I don't think I would care to go back to them now," he said.

Mr. Oliver nodded gravely. "Your mother doesn't seem to think a great deal of this opening, but, on the

other hand, you want to bear in mind that if you expect to make money in ranching you must be able to invest it. Raising cattle and fruit for sale is a trade, and a trader gets no more than a certain interest on his money and the wages which an equally capable managing clerk or foreman in the same profession would receive. There are few respectable businesses in which that interest is a very big one. As the result of this, the trader must be content with a little unless he has the money to earn him more."

"Yes," said Frank somewhat ruefully, "that's clear. I'm afraid I can hardly count on much."

"Your mother mentions that when you are three or four years older she might perhaps be able to raise you about two thousand dollars."

"I suppose that wouldn't go very far, sir?"

"It certainly wouldn't buy you a ranch anywhere near a city, but you might get land enough to make a small one back in the bush. If you bought such a place, you would probably have to go out and work at one of the sawmills or logging camps now and then. It would be several years before you could make much of a living, because it would cost you so much to bring your stock to market."

"Yes," said Frank. "I suppose that is why the land would be cheap?"

Mr. Oliver made a sign of assent. "It's a difficulty which is, however, usually got over in this country. You hold on and cultivate your land, and by and by the market comes to you. Somebody starts a sawmill or a pulp mill in the locality, or, if there's ore about, a smelter. New trails are cut, settlements spring up, and presently a branch railroad comes along, and the rancher can sell everything he can raise." He broke off for a moment, and smiled rather dryly. "In such a case you may get big prices, but if you average them out over the years of working and waiting, you'll find you have earned

them, and that, after all, the stuff you sell is mighty cheap."

Then he handed Frank the letter. "I'd consider it carefully. The mail won't leave for the next three days, and now we'll go along to supper."

Harry had managed to prepare a meal, and when it was over Mr. Oliver turned to the boys.

"A friend of mine in Victoria has written asking me to look at a big piece of bush land he thinks of buying on the west coast of Vancouver Island. He offers to pay my expenses and a fee, and I've an idea that we might run across in the sloop if we get moderately fine weather after the hay is in. I wonder if you would like to go with me?"

There was no doubt that the prospect appealed to them and Mr. Oliver smiled his approval.

"Then," he said, "you had better hustle that hay in. We'll start as soon as we're through with it."

CHAPTER X

A BREEZE OF WIND

THE hay was almost in when Frank and Harry stood one evening close under the apex of the roof in the log barn. The crop was heavy and because the barn was small it had been their business during the afternoon to spread and trample down the grass Jake flung up to them. They had been working at high pressure at one task or another since soon after daylight that morning, and now the confined space was very hot, though the sun was low. Its slanting rays smote the cedar shingles above their bent heads, and the dust that rose from the grass floated about them in a cloud and clung to their dripping faces. Frank felt that the veins on his forehead were swollen when they paused a moment for breath, leaning on their forks.

"I suppose we could get a couple more loads in, and there can't be more than that," said Harry dubiously. "I wouldn't mind a great deal if the next jumperful upset."

Frank devoutly wished it would, for he felt that he must get out into the open air, but a few moments later they heard the plodding oxen's feet and the groaning of the clumsy sled. The sounds ceased abruptly and Jake's voice reached them.

"Tramp it down good!" he called. "You've got to squeeze in this lot and another."

Frank choked down the answer which rose to his lips. But the hay must be got in, and the boys fell with their forks upon the first of the crackling grass Jake flung up to them. There seemed to be more dust in it than usual,

and before the jumper was half unloaded they were panting heavily. When at last the oxen hauled the sled away they stood doubled up knee-deep in the hay with their backs close against the roof.

"I can't see how we're to make room for the last lot," Harry gasped. "Still, I guess it has to be done."

They set to work again, packing the hay into corners and stamping it down, and his occupation reminded Frank of what he had heard about mining in a thin seam of coal. It seemed hotter than ever, the dust was choking, and at every incautious move he bumped his head or shoulders against the beams. The last sled arrived before they were ready for it, and they crawled about half buried, dragging the grass here and there with their hands and ramming it with their feet and knees into any odd spaces left. At length the work was finished, and wriggling toward the opening in the wall, Harry caught at the edge of it and finding a foothold on a log beneath boldly leaped down. Frank was, however, less fortunate when he followed his companion, for some of the hay slipped away beneath him, and, without the least intention of leaving the barn in that undignified fashion, he suddenly shot out through the hole. He felt the air rush past him, and then, somewhat to his astonishment, found himself on the ground, none the worse except for the jar of the fall.

"If I'd tried to do that it's very likely I'd have broken my leg," he panted.

He sat down and threw off his hat. It was delightful to feel the breeze upon his dripping face and to be out in the fresh air again. He had been at work for fourteen hours, and was aching all over, but that did not trouble him. The hay was safely in, and there was some satisfaction in the feeling that he had done his part in a heavy piece of work. Looking about him he noticed that the shadow of the firs had crept half across the clearing, and that thin wisps of fleecy cloud were stream-

ing by high above their tall black tops. Then he heard Harry speaking to his father.

"There's a smart southerly breeze, and the tide is running ebb," he was saying. "What's the matter with starting for Victoria right away?"

"Haven't you done enough for to-day?" Mr. Oliver asked with a smile.

"I don't feel as fresh as I did this morning," Harry admitted. "Anyway, when we've got a fair wind and three or four hours' ebb going with us, it would be a pity not to make the most of them."

Mr. Oliver looked doubtful. "I'm anxious to get away, because, as I've arranged to meet a man in Victoria, we'll have to take the steamer unless we can slip across very shortly. I've an idea that we may get more wind than we'll have any use for before sun-up. Still, we could run in behind the point at Bannington's, if it was necessary."

Then Jake broke in: "If you're going, I'll get supper and pack some bread and pork along to the sloop."

Mr. Oliver assented, and an hour later they paddled off to the sloop. The dog jumped into the canoe with them, and when they got on board he quietly sat down on the floorings while Jake helped the boys to hoist the mainsail. When they came to the jib Mr. Oliver stood up on the deck looking about him.

"I think we'd better have the smaller one," he advised.

They were ready at length, and Jake, who was to stay behind, called the dog as he was about to jump into the canoe. Harry was busy forward just then with the mooring chain in his hand and the loose jib thrashing about him, while the big mainboom jerked over Mr. Oliver's head as he sat at the helm. The dog, however, showed no signs of moving.

"Give him a shove," said Jake, addressing Frank. "When he gets up on deck, pitch him in."

Frank turned toward the dog, and then stopped abruptly when it showed its teeth and growled.

"It looks as if he meant to go along," Jake remarked with a grin. "Prod him with the boathook if he won't move."

Frank was dubious, as he imagined the dog might resent the prodding. At that moment Harry, who had been too busy to notice what was going on, hauled up the weather sheet of the jib.

"I'm clear," he called to his father. "I'll cant her head to lee when you're ready."

Mr. Oliver put the helm up as the bows swung around, and when the sloop slanted over Jake made a futile grab at the dog. Then shouting to Frank, he dropped into the canoe and clutched the rail as the sloop forged ahead, but the boy was busy with the mainsheet and did not look up. In another moment Jake let go. Almost immediately afterward the sloop came round, and when she stretched away toward the mouth of the cove the canoe dropped astern.

"Stand by your jibsheet," called Mr. Oliver. "We'll have to come round again."

They were very busy during the next few minutes, for the cove was narrow and the wind was blowing in. When at length they swept out into the open water the dog crawled up to Harry and licked his hands. Harry looked at his father, who made a little sign of assent.

"I suppose he'll have to stay," he sighed. "When that dog decides on doing anything it's wise to let him do it. Now we'll square off the mainboom."

They let the sheet run until the big mainsail swung right out, and the sloop drove away, rolling viciously. Short, foam-flecked seas came tumbling after her, but as the tide was running the same way under them, lessening the resistance, very few broke angrily. Frank had learned enough by this time, however, to realize that

it would probably be different when the stream turned. In the meanwhile the boat was sailing very fast, with a little ridge of frothing water washing by on either side when she lifted, and a thin shower of spray blowing all over her. Now and then the great sail with the heavy boom beneath it swung upward in an alarming fashion. Frank noticed that Mr. Oliver's eyes were gazing intently before him, and that his hands were clenched tightly upon the tiller.

"She seems rather bad to steer," he said.

"Yes," said Mr. Oliver, without looking up. "You have to be careful when you're running before a fresh breeze. It's remarkably easy to bring the mainsail over with a bang if you let her fall off too much, and the result of that would probably be to tear the mast out of her. It's considerably worse when there's a big sea coming along behind."

Frank glanced astern. The sun had gone and the sky was strewn with ranks of hurrying clouds, while the sea was flecked with smears of white.

"Aren't you pressing her a little?" Harry asked. "She'd be easier on the helm if we lowered the peak or tied a reef in."

"I'd like to pick up the Hootalquin reef before it's dark," answered Mr. Oliver. "I'm not sure we'll get very much farther to-night. You wanted a sail, and I fancy you're going to be gratified."

During the next hour Frank had to admit that this remark was warranted. The breeze steadily freshened, and there was no doubt that the sea was rising. It frothed in a white hillock on either side of the boat, and little trails of foam swirled about her deck. Frank could see that she was overburdened by the sail she was carrying, but Mr. Oliver still sat with a set face at the tiller and showed no desire to leave his post. In the meanwhile it was getting dark. Forest and beach had faded to a faint, shadowy blur and there was only a

steadily narrowing stretch of foaming water in front of them. Frank was very wet and the spray beat upon him continually. At length, when the light had almost gone, a dusky patch of something grew out of the gathering gloom ahead, and fancying it to be a rocky point, he felt considerably relieved, because there would be shelter behind it. A minute or two later Mr. Oliver called to the boys.

"Get forward and ease the peak down," he ordered. "Then back the jib. We'll tie two reefs in."

"Aren't we going in here?" Harry asked.

His father shook his head. "No, it's too dark. I could take her through in the daylight, but there are one or two rocks in the channel. We'll have to try for Bannington's."

Frank felt a twinge of disappointment. Bannington's was still a good way off, and it seemed to him that the gale was increasing every moment. He scrambled forward with Harry, however, and when they loosened the rope the tall peak of the sail swung down. Soon after they had done this Mr. Oliver put down his helm, causing the mainboom to jerk and thrash to and fro furiously, while as the boat came up head to wind a white sea struck her side and foamed on board her.

"Handy with the throat!" shouted Mr. Oliver. "I don't want to leave the helm."

They slacked another rope, making the gaff sink farther down, after which they tied up about a yard of the inner bottom corner of the sail to the foot of the mast. This was comparatively easy, but it was different when, standing in the water on the lee deck, they grabbed the tackle beneath the boom and endeavored to pull the leach, or outer edge, of the mainsail down. It would not come, and the heavy spar struck them as it jerked in board, flinging Frank off into the well.

"Get another pull on your topping lift," ordered Mr. Oliver.

They jumped forward to do it, but it proved no easy task, for they had to raise the outer end of the heavy boom. They were struggling with the tackle again when Mr. Oliver laid both hands on the rope.

"Now," he shouted, "heave, and bowse her down!"

They succeeded this time, and afterward hung out over the water while they knotted the reef-points beneath the spar. Then when they had trimmed the jib over Mr. Oliver put up his helm and the sloop drove on again into the darkness with shortened sail.

The boys sat down as far under the side deck as they could get, out of the worst of the spray, with the dog crouching in the water which washed about the floorings at their feet.

"Why didn't your father help us more than he did?" Frank asked presently.

"He couldn't leave the tiller for more than a moment or two," said Harry. "When Jake and I reefed her the day we took you off the steamer there wasn't as much wind. Of course, there are boats in which you can lash the helm, but that's not always possible. If dad had let go the tiller she'd have fallen off and started sailing, which would have dragged the tackle from our hands or pitched us in, and then she'd have come up again banging and shaking. He kept her heading so that the main-sail was lifting slack with no weight in it."

Frank was commencing to realize that the handling of a sailboat was rather a fine art. It is as much of a machine as a steamer, but it is also of the kind whose efficiency depends directly upon the human eye, hand and brain. Man has evolved a number of such instruments, and in the right hands they are far more wonderful than the others. Any one, for instance, can learn the pianola, but to extract fine music from a Cremona violin is a very different matter.

It blew steadily harder, and there was, as Frank noticed, a difference in the sea, for the flood stream was

now setting up against them and was growing shorter and more turbulent. There was a smaller interval between the waves, which seemed to become steeper and less regular. They curled over and broke about the boat with a sound that reacted unpleasantly upon Frank's nerves, and he was thankful that he could, after all, see very little of them. The sloop's motion also changed. One moment she seemed to be moving almost slowly, and the next she swung up in a quick, savage rush, with her bows in the air and the white foam boiling high about her. Sometimes, too, there was a thud and a splash astern, and the decks were swept by a deluge of seething water.

In the meanwhile the boys had contrived to light a lamp in a little box which held a compass, and they laid it on the thwart before Mr. Oliver, though, as he explained in a word or two, it was particularly difficult to steer an exact course in a sea of that kind. It was on the boat's quarter, that is, she was traveling with the wind almost behind her at a long slant across the course of the waves, but each time an extra big wave foamed up astern Mr. Oliver let her fall off and run right down wind with it to prevent its breaking on board.

Frank wondered how he did it, for the seas were following them and it was quite dark, but Mr. Oliver had no need to look around. He had for guides the sound of the oncoming seas, the pull of the tiller, and the motion of the boat, and, besides, from long experience his brain worked sub-consciously. He did not pause to consider when the bows climbed out and the stern sank down in a rush of foam, and had he done so, in all probability he would have brought the big mainboom smashing over. To run a fore-and-aft rigged craft, and a sloop in particular, before a badly breaking sea, is a difficult and somewhat perilous thing, and the ability to do it comes only from long acquaintance with the water, and, perhaps, from something in the helmsman's nature.

The boat sped on furiously, though they presently lowered the peak down to reduce the sail further, and by degrees Frank became conscious of an unpleasant nervous tension that seemed to sap away his hardihood. There was nothing to do in the meanwhile, but he felt that if he were called upon for any difficult or hazardous service he would find himself incapable of it. He was drenched and shivering, and he did not want to move. He only wished to cower beside Harry under the partial shelter of the coaming. This was, however, a feeling that other folks occasionally experience who go to sea in small vessels, which they have to grapple with and overcome. It is when there is no particular call on him, and he can only stand by and watch, that terror gets its strongest hold on the heart of a man.

At length Mr. Oliver called to the boys. "We must be close abreast of Bannington's," he said. "The end of the point should be to leeward. Get forward, Harry, where you can see out beneath the jib."

Frank followed his companion as he crawled up on the little deck. He did not want to seem afraid, but he held on tight with one hand when they knelt in the water that splashed about them. He could see the frothy seas beneath the black curve of the jib, but for what seemed a very long while there was nothing else. Then Harry suddenly raised his voice.

"Point's right ahead!" he sang out, and the next moment jumped to his feet. "There's a black patch a little to weather."

"Up peak for your lives!" cried Mr. Oliver.

He left the helm with a bound, and all three struggled desperately with a rope, while as the bagged mainsail extended and straightened out a sea broke on board the boat. Then they floundered aft and dragged in the mainsheet with all their might, after which Mr. Oliver jumped for the helm again, while the boys flattened in the jib.

"We're the wrong side of the point," gasped Harry. "I'm not sure she'll beat round it."

There was no difficulty in imagining what was likely to happen if she failed to do so, and Frank, who did not think she would last long if she washed up among the boulders before the sea that was running, clung to the coaming in a state of tense suspense. What seemed to be a continuous sheet of spray whirled about him, the boat slanted over at an alarming angle with half her lee deck in the sea, and the tops of the confused breaking waves through which she plunged washed all over her. This was sailing with a vengeance, and a very different thing from lounging at the tiller while she swung smoothly across the water before a fair wind. She was now thrashing to windward for her life, with the full weight of the sea on her weather bow and a foam-swept reef lying in wait close to lee of her, and whether she would claw off it or not depended largely upon her helmsman's skill.

Frank could see him dimly, a black shape gripping the tiller, and he was unpleasantly aware of the fact that there would speedily be an end of them all if he lost his nerve for a moment or made a blunder. It happens now and then at sea that the safety of crew and vessel hangs upon the brute strength of human muscle and the simple valor which enables a man to do what is required of him on the moment without flinching; empty assurance and a consequential air are of uncommonly little service then. Such occasions are a very grim test of manhood, and, as a rule, it is not the loud talker who best stands that strain.

Frank admitted afterward that he was badly scared, which was not in the least unnatural. It was more important that he should nevertheless realize that it was his business to trim the jib over when this was necessary. His companion, who was gazing to leeward, presently raised his voice.

"Broken water close ahead," he announced.

"Stand by your jib!" shouted Mr. Oliver. "We must try to heave her around."

Frank let the lee sheet run, groping deep in the water for it as Mr. Oliver put down the helm, and with a frantic thrashing of canvas the sloop came up into the wind. There was a moment of suspense during which she seemed to stop, and the boy felt his heart thumping furiously. He knew that if she fell off again on the previous tack nothing could save her from going ashore. Suddenly he heard Harry call to him.

"Haul it up!" he shouted. "We have to box her off."

Frank hauled with all his might, and the thrashing of the head sail ceased. It caught the wind, and a sea fell upon the boat as the bows swung around. Then they jumped to the opposite side of her and struggled desperately to haul the lee sheet in as she forged ahead again, after which there was nothing to do but wait and wonder if she was driving in toward the shore or working out toward open water. They stood on for half an hour, seeing nothing, and then came round half-swamped, only to stagger away on the opposite tack, running once more into horribly broken water. As they did so Harry shouted that there were boulders, the end of the point, he fancied, close to lee.

"She won't come about in the rabble," said Mr. Oliver.

It was evident that they must now either scrape around the point on that tack or go ashore, and Frank felt his nerves tingle as he gazed into the spray. He fancied that there was something black and solid beyond it, but could distinguish nothing further. Then the blackness faded, the sea seemed to become a little more regular, and Harry cried out hoarsely, "We're round!"

"Down peak!" called Mr. Oliver. "We'll have to jibe her."

Frank had learned that to jibe a boat is to turn her around stern to wind, instead of head-on, which is the usual way, and scrambling forward with Harry he helped lower the peak. After that they again floundered aft, leaving the mainsail reduced in size, and grabbed the sheet as Mr. Oliver put up his helm. The bows swung around as the boat went up with a sea, and the big boom tilted high up into the darkness above the boys. They struggled savagely with the sheet, which slightly restrained it, until the boat rolled suddenly down upon her side as the sail jerked over and the rope was torn swiftly through their hands. There was a crash and a bang, and Frank was conscious that the water was pouring over the coaming. He clung to the sheet, however, and while Mr. Oliver helped them with one hand they got a little of it in, after which the sloop, rising somewhat, drove forward. A few minutes later the sea suddenly became smoother, the wind seemed cut off, and Frank made out a black mass of rock rising close above them. They ran on beneath it until Mr. Oliver, rounding the boat up, bade them pitch the anchor over.

CHAPTER XI

MR. BARCLAY JOINS THE PARTY

WHEN the boat brought up to her anchor the boys spent some time straightening up her gear and pumping her out. The work put a little warmth into them, but they were glad to crawl into the cabin when it was done. There was scarcely room in it to sit upright, and with the moisture standing beaded everywhere it looked rather like the inside of a well. Mr. Oliver had lighted the stove and a lamp was burning. By and by he took off a hissing kettle, and when they had made a meal they lay down in their wet clothes amidst a raffle of more or less dripping ropes and sails. Fortunately, the place was warm, and Frank was thankful to stretch himself out along the side of the boat. He was discovering that mental strain of the kind he had undergone during the last few hours is as fatiguing as bodily labor.

But he did not immediately go to sleep. The craft rocked upon the long swell which worked in round the point, with now and then a sharp rattle as she plucked hard at her cable. Sometimes she swung suddenly around upon it as an eddy blast swept down from the rocks above, and the drumming of the halliards against the mast broke continuously through the moan of the wind among the trees ashore and the deeper rumble of the ground sea. At last, however, he fell into a heavy slumber, and it was daylight and Harry had put the spider on the stove when he awoke again. He made his breakfast before he went out on deck, to find that the wind had dropped a little and it was rain-

ing hard. The dim, slate-green water lapped noisily upon the wall of rock close by, and glancing seaward he saw nothing but a leaden haze and a short stretch of tumbling combers. Mr. Oliver had gone out earlier and was standing on the deck looking about him.

"There's no great weight in the wind, though the sea's still rather high," he said presently. "I think we can push on for Victoria."

Frank, who fancied they would not get there before that night, was by no means so keen about the sail as he had been on the previous day. He felt that it would be considerably pleasanter to remain in the shelter of the point until the sun came out or the wind went down, and it seemed to him that Harry shared his opinion. The dog also looked very draggled and miserable and had evidently had enough of the voyage. They, however, set the mainsail, leaving the reefs in, hauled up the anchor, and hoisted the jib as the sloop stretched out across the waste of tumbling water, after which the boys went below to straighten up the breakfast things. Frank once or twice felt a little sick as he did so, and he noticed that Harry wore a somewhat anxious look.

"It's not blowing as hard as it was when we ran in, but I don't think dad would have gone unless he'd some particular reason," Harry said at length. "I wonder who the man is he expects to meet in Victoria, because I'm inclined to believe it's not the one who wants him to look at the land. The worst of dad is that he keeps such a lot to himself."

They crawled out again shortly afterward and found the seas getting longer and bigger. Once or twice a blur of something went by that might have been the end of an island, and Mr. Oliver changed his course a little, but after that the dim, green water stretched away before them empty and only broken by smears of snowy froth, and the sloop drove on before the combers

which came up out of the haze astern of her in long succession.

It was toward noon, and Mr. Oliver had gone into the cabin to get dinner ready, leaving Harry at the helm, when, glancing around, Frank saw an indistinct mass of something break out of the mist. It grew into the shadowy shape of a steamer while he watched it.

"There's a big vessel close by," he said, touching his companion's arm.

Harry glanced over his shoulder. "Sure," he nodded. "What's more, she's coming right along our track. Get in some mainsheet while I luff her."

He changed the sloop's course a trifle, but in the meanwhile the steamer was growing in size and distinctness with a marvelous rapidity. Her great bow seemed to be rising out of the water like a headland, over which Frank could just see the tiers of white deckhouses, one mast, and the tall smokestack. Then he glanced forward at the sloop's wet deck and the low strip of her double-reefed mainsail, looking very small among the tumbling seas, and it occurred to him that it would probably be difficult for the steamer's lookout to see them. He felt rather anxious when he glanced back astern.

"She still seems to be coming right down on us," he said.

Harry called his father, who hurried out and glanced at the vessel.

"Shall we get up and yell?" the boy asked.

"No," said Mr. Oliver curtly, "they couldn't hear you to windward. Let her come up farther."

Frank helped drag some more mainsheet and then looked around again with a very unpleasant thrill of apprehension. The black bow seemed almost above them, and the sea leaped against a wall of plates as the great mass of iron swung slowly out of it and sank down again. Then from somewhere beside the smoke-

stack a streak of white steam blew out and a great reverberatory roar came hurtling about them. Mr. Oliver's anxious face relaxed.

"They've seen us," he said. "Her helm's going over."

The bow drew out and lengthened into an increasing strip of side. Another mast became visible, with a double row of white deckhouses and a tier of boats between. Here and there a cluster of diminutive figures showed up among them, and then the great ship sped by with the whole of her size revealed. The sloop plunged madly on her screw-torn wake, but in another minute or two she had drawn away and was melting into the haze again.

"A big boat," said Mr. Oliver. "She was very close to us. You had better keep your eyes open while I get dinner."

The rest of the dismal day passed uneventfully, but toward evening the haze commenced to roll aside and they saw blurred black pines looming up ahead of them. A little later they ran into Victoria harbor, and, hiring a Siwash to take them ashore, walked through the streets of what struck Frank as a very handsome city until they reached a hotel. Here they ordered supper, and after the meal was over the boys, who had changed their clothes, sat with Mr. Oliver in the almost deserted smoking room. He seemed to be expecting somebody, which somewhat astonished Frank, but he noticed that Harry smiled meaningly when Mr. Barclay walked in. He was dressed in light-colored sporting garments, with a belt around his waist and a leather patch on one shoulder, and there were gaudy trout flies stuck in his little cloth cap. He threw the cap on the table before he shook hands with Mr. Oliver and the boys, smiling as he caught Harry's eye.

"Well," he asked, indicating the flies, "what do you think of them?"

Harry grinned again as he laid his finger on one.

"You're not going to get many trout with that fellow, unless they've different habits in British Columbia. They won't come on for quite a while."

Mr. Barclay removed the fly and put it into a wallet.

"Thanks," he said. "It's some time since I did any fishing." Then he seemed to notice the manner in which the boy was surveying his clothing. "It's a sport's get-up, but are you acquainted with any reason why a United States citizen shouldn't get a little innocent amusement catching Canadian trout?"

"No, sir," answered Harry coolly. "Still, there are quite a few trout in the rivers on the American side of the boundary. It makes one wonder if you had anything else in view besides fishing in coming to British Columbia."

Mr. Barclay regarded him with an air of ironical reproof.

"In a general way, young man, it's most unwise to blurt the thing right out when you have a suspicion in your mind. It's better to let it stay there until you have good cause to act on it." He turned to Mr. Oliver. "I'm inclined to doubt the advisability of leaving your sloop lying where she is in full view of the wharf."

"Then you recognized her?"

"At a glance. The trouble is that there are one or two acquaintances of yours who might do the same."

Mr. Oliver looked thoughtful.

"I've been considering that, but it was getting dark when we ran in, and we had better move the first thing to-morrow. Now with this unsettled weather I'm not very keen on sailing up the west coast, which is open to the Pacific, and the place we are bound for is rather a long way."

"Then go east," advised Mr. Barclay. "There are a number of inlets on that side of the island within easy reach of the railroad, and you ought to reach the

nearest of them in a few hours. I'll go on with the cars to-morrow, and if you don't get in at one of the way stations, I'll wait for you at Wellington. Then we could cross to the west coast by the Alberni stage and hire a couple of Indians and a sea canoe. It wouldn't be a long run from there."

Mr. Oliver agreed to this, and getting up early next morning, they slipped out of the harbor, and some hours afterward crept into a forest-girt inlet, where they left the sloop. There was a depot nearby, and getting on board the cars when the next train came in, they found Mr. Barclay awaiting them. Early in the afternoon they alighted at a little wooden, colliery town, and next day they crossed the island in the stage over a very rough trail which led through tremendous forests. Once they passed a wonderful blue lake lying deep-sunk between steep walls of hills. Then they crossed a divide and came winding down into a valley with water flashing at the foot of it. It was evening when they arrived at a straggling settlement on the banks of a riband of salt water twisting away among the forest-shrouded hills, and found several Indians there who had come up in their sea canoes.

Mr. Oliver hired a couple of them, and they started after they had purchased a few stores. A light, pine-scented breeze was blowing down the valley when they thrust the canoe off from the shingle. They had no sooner done so, however, when the dog arose with a deep growl which indicated that he objected to the Indians going with them. As his actions did not seem to have the desired effect he seized the nearest Indian by the leg, and it was only when Harry belabored him with a paddle that he could be induced to let go. Then he barked at them savagely until Frank drew him down upon his knee with a hand about his neck, while the Siwash raised two little masts. In the meanwhile the boy watched the men with interest, and decided that

they had very little in common with the prairie Indians he had seen in pictures and from the cars.

They were dressed neatly in clothes which had evidently been purchased at a store, and though their faces were brown and their hair rather coarse and dark there was nothing else unusual about them. They talked with Mr. Oliver and Mr. Barclay freely in what Harry said was Chinook, a readily learned lingua-franca in use on parts of the Pacific Slope. Then Frank fixed his attention upon the canoe, a long, narrow, and beautifully shaped craft with the usual tall, bird's-head bow. She was rather shallow, but Harry said that this made her paddle fast. He added that though these canoes would sail reasonably well when the breeze was fair the Indians usually drove them to windward with the paddle unless the sea was too heavy, in which case they generally made for the beach and pulled the craft out.

Frank remembered that this, or something like it, was the ancient practice, and that it was only by slow degrees that man had discovered he could still make the wind propel his vessel to its destination when it blew from ahead. Greek and Roman triremes, Alexandrian wheat ships, and Viking galleys, had made wonderful voyages, and they all carried sail, but they set it only when the wind was fair. When it drew ahead they stowed their canvas and thrashed the lean hull through the seas with their long oars. Now, after perfecting his vessel's under-water body, inventing the center board, and learning how to make flat-setting sails, man was going back to the old-time plan, only that instead of relying upon the muscle of close-packed rowers he used improved propellers, tri-compound reciprocators and turbines.

One of the Siwash shook out the two spritsails which sat on a pole stretching up to the peak from the foot of the mast, and when he had led the sheets aft his

companion knelt astern with a paddle held over the gunwale. Slanting gently down to the faint breeze, the craft slid away through the smooth, green water with a long ripple running back behind her. The log houses dropped astern and were lost among the trees, a valley filled with somber forest, and a rampart of tall hillside, slipped by, and as they crept on from point to point the strip of still water stretched away before them between somber ranks of climbing trees.

Frank had no idea how far they had gone when the light began to fail, though he fancied that the shallow craft, now slipping forward so smoothly, was sailing a good deal faster than she seemed to be. At length one of the Siwash loosened the sheets and stowed the sails, while his companion turned the bows toward the beach. She slid in and grounded gently on a bank of shingle in a little cove, where a gigantic forest crept down to the water. They got out and ran her up, filled their kettle at a tinkling creek, hewed resinous chips from a fallen fir, and built a fire. Then they cut armfuls of thin spruce branches with which to make their beds, and presently sat down to an ample supper.

When it was over the Indians went down to the canoe, and Mr. Oliver and Mr. Barclay drew a little apart from the boys. Frank, lying near Harry beneath a big cedar, raised himself up on one elbow and watched the firelight flicker upon the mighty trunks. On the one hand they were lost in the gloom of the dense mass of dusky foliage, but on the other their great branches cut against the sky, which was still softly blue, and a blaze of silver radiance stretched across the water, for a half-moon had just sailed up above the opposite hill. Out of the silence there stole a faint whispering from the tops of the taller trees and the languid lapping of water among the stones, but there was no other sound, and once more Frank was glad that he had not exchanged

the stillness of the wilderness for the turmoil of the cities. He had now definitely decided to become a rancher.

It grew colder by and by, and wrapping his blanket around him, he wriggled down closer among the yielding spruce twigs. The great trunks grew dimmer and the smoke wisps which drifted among them became less distinct. By degrees they all grew mixed together — a confusion of sliding vapor and spectral trees — and he was conscious of nothing more.

CHAPTER XII

THE STRANGER

A COUPLE of days later the party pitched their camp in the depths of a lonely valley sloping to the Pacific, which was not far away. It was filled with great redwoods, balsams and cedars, and as Frank gazed at the endless rows of towering trunks it struck him as curious that Mr. Oliver's friend should think of buying this tract of giant forest for ranching land. He said so to Harry, who laughed.

"There's no rock or gravel on it and that counts for a good deal," said his companion. "If the soil looks as if it would grow things, it's about all the average man expects on this side of the Rockies. A few trees more or less don't matter. It's the same with us right down the Pacific Slope; the only difference is that on this island the firs seem just a little bigger." He appeared to admit the latter fact reluctantly, adding, "I guess that's because it's wetter in Canada."

They were standing outside a little tent of the kind most often used in the Western bush. It was supported by a ridge pole resting at either end upon two more, which were spread well apart at the bottom and crossed near the top. A short branch stay stretched back from each pair, and a few turns of cord lashing held the whole frame together. They had cut the poles in five minutes in the bush, and had brought the light cotton cover with them rolled up in a bundle. A good many men in that country live in such shelters during most of the year. Mr. Barclay sat on one of the hearth logs which were

rolled close together in front of the tent and Mr. Oliver stood in the entrance.

"But the place must be such a tremendous way from a market," said Frank in response to Harry's last remark.

Mr. Oliver smiled. "It's not long since I tried to explain that a good many of the bush ranchers have to wait until the market comes to them. They stake their dollars and a number of years of hard work on the future of the country."

"Some of them get badly left now and then," said Mr. Barclay dryly. "You'll find laid-out townsites that have never grown up all along the Pacific Slope. There are stores and hotels falling to pieces in one or two I've struck." Then changing the subject: "Are you boys coming across with me to the river for some fishing to-morrow?"

They said that they would be glad to do so, and Mr. Barclay turned to Mr. Oliver. "We'll give you another two days to finish your surveying, and then we'll meet you at the rancherie on the inlet we spoke of. We can camp in the bush outside the tent for a couple of nights."

They started early the next morning, taking one Indian with them to pack their provisions, and the dog, who insisted on accompanying them. They were plodding along a hillside toward noon when Mr. Barclay, who was walking in front with their guide, looked back at the boys.

"Get hold of the dog as soon as we stop and keep him quiet," he cautioned.

After that they moved forward in silence for some minutes while the trees grew thinner ahead of them, until Mr. Barclay stopped behind a brake of undergrowth. The dog broke into a short, throaty bark and then growled hoarsely until Frank knelt beside him and laid

a hand upon his collar. When he had quieted the animal, who by degrees had become attached to him, he arose and found he could look down upon a narrow slit of valley into which the sunlight poured. A creek swirled through the bottom of it, and he was astonished to see a swarm of blue-clad figures toiling with grubhoe and shovel upon its banks, and a cluster of bark shelters in the widest part of the hollow.

"Chinamen!" he said. "What can they be doing? One never would have expected to find a colony of them here."

Mr. Barclay smiled in a somewhat curious fashion.

"They're washing gold. It's a remarkably simple process, if you're willing to work hard enough. You shovel out the soil and sand and keep on washing it until it's all washed away. Any gold there is remains in the bottom of the pan."

"But if there's gold in that creek, how is it there are no white men about?"

"Probably because they couldn't make wages. There's a little gold in a number of the creeks right down the Slope, but where the quantity's very small nobody but a Chinaman finds it worth while to look for it."

Mr. Barclay sat down and spent some minutes apparently carefully watching the blue-clad figures toiling in the sunlight below, after which he got up and signaled for them to go on again. The boys, however, dropped a little behind, and presently Harry gave his companion a nudge.

"I guess you noticed that when you said one wouldn't have expected to find those Chinamen here Barclay didn't answer it?"

"Yes," said Frank thoughtfully. "I suppose you mean he wasn't astonished when he saw them?"

"You've hit it, first time," Harry assented. "That man's on the trail, and though I can't tell you exactly

who he's getting after, I've my ideas." He paused with a chuckle. "I'm not sure now he's quite so much of a stuffed image as he seemed to be."

Frank said nothing in answer to this. A few minutes later Harry touched his arm as Mr. Barclay, turning suddenly, shouted:

"Get hold of the dog!"

Frank grabbed at the animal's collar but missed it, and the next moment the dog had vanished. Then there was a crash in the bush, and a beautiful slender creature with long legs and little horns shot out from behind a thicket and flung itself high into the air. It fell again, this time with scarcely a sound, into a clump of fern, rose out of it, and in a wonderful bound cleared a fallen trunk with broken branches projecting from it. Then it was lost in another thicket and the dog's harsh barking rang through the silence of the woods. Once or twice again Frank caught a momentary glimpse of a marvelously agile creature rising and falling among the undergrowth, and then there was only the yelping of the dog which became fainter and fainter and finally broke out at irregular intervals. Mr. Barclay sat down upon the fallen trees.

"I suppose we'll have to wait until that amiable pet of yours comes back," he said. "On the whole it's fortunate the deer broke out now instead of a quarter of an hour earlier."

They waited a considerable time before the dog crept up to them wagging his ragged tail in a disappointed manner. Harry shook his fishing rod at him threateningly.

"I'd lay into you good, only it wouldn't be any use," he said. "The more you're whacked, the worse you get."

The dog wagged his tail again and jumped upon Frank, who patted him before they resumed the march.

"It's rather curious, but that's the first deer I've seen

since I've been in the country," he said. "Do they always jump like that?"

"Well," said Harry, "in a general way they are quite hard to see, and you can walk right past one without noticing it when it's standing still. Their colors match the trunks and the fern, and, what's more important, it's not often you can see the whole of them. In fact, I've struck as many deer by accident as I've done when I've been trailing them. Now and then you almost walk right up to one, though I haven't the least notion how it is they don't hear you, because as a rule the one you're trailing will leave you out of sight in a few moments if you snap a twig. Anyway, a scared deer goes over whatever lies in front of him. There are very few things he can't jump, and he comes down almost without a sound."

The rest of the journey proved uneventful, and early in the evening they made camp on the banks of a frothing river which swept out of the shadow crystal clear. In this it differed, as Harry explained, from most of the larger ones on the Pacific Slope, which are usually fed by melted snow and stained a faint green. Mr. Barclay, whose boots and clothes were already considerably the worse for wear, sat down beside a swirling pool and took out his pipe.

"There's no use pitching a fly across it yet, I suppose," he said. "We may as well get supper before we start."

The Siwash prepared the meal and remained behind with Mr. Barclay when it was over, while the two boys went down stream with a rod he had lent them which Harry insisted Frank should take. There were, he urged, plenty of trout in the river near his father's ranch, though it was very seldom he had leisure to go after them. They wandered on some distance beside the water, which ran almost west toward the Pacific,

and wherever the forest was a little thinner the slanting sunrays streaming between the serried trunks smote along it. Frank, who had, as it happened, once or twice got a week or two's fishing in the East, kept his eyes open, but it was only twice that he fancied he noticed the faint dimple made by a short-rising trout.

"I'd have expected to find a river of this kind thick with fish," he said.

"There's sure to be a good many in it," answered Harry. "You wait about another half hour."

"What's the matter with starting now?" urged Frank. "Isn't that one rising in the slack yonder?"

"See if you can get him," said Harry, smiling.

Frank swung the rod, straining every effort to make a neat, clean cast, and he succeeded. The flies dropped lightly about a foot above the dimple made by the fish, and swept down stream across the spot where he had reason to suppose it was waiting. There was no response, however, and nothing broke the rippling surface when the flies floated down a second time. Frank laid down the rod.

"It's curious," he murmured.

Harry laughed. "Hold on a little. You've seen three fish rising now, and that's quite out of the common."

Frank sat down again, and waited until the sunlight faded off the river and the firs about it suddenly grew blacker. Soon afterward what seemed an almost solid cloud of tiny insects drifted along the surface of the water, which was immediately broken by multitudinous splashes.

"Now you can begin," said Harry.

Frank, clambering to a ledge of rock, swung his rod, and as the flies swept across an eddy there was a splash and a swirl and a sudden tightening of the line. He got the butt down as the winch commenced to clink, and

Harry waded out into the stream lower down, holding his wide hat.

"Let him run, but keep a strain on," he cried "You've got a big one."

The fish fought for three or four minutes, gleaming, a streak of silver, through the shadowy flood, as it showed its side, then sprang clear and changed again to a half-seen dusky shape that drove violently here and there. Then it came up toward the bending point of the rod, and at length Harry, slipping his hat beneath it, lifted it out.

"Nearly three quarters of a pound," he said. "Your trace is clear now. Try again, and never mind about the slack and eddies. Pitch your flies anywhere."

Frank did so, and they had scarcely fallen when there was a second rush, but this fish seemed smaller and he dragged it out unceremoniously upon the shingle. It was the same the next cast, and for a while he was kept desperately busy. When at length he laid the rod down Harry announced that they had a dozen fish.

"We'll try the next pool now," he added. "Some of these trout aren't half a pound and I'd like you to get a real big one."

The next pool proved to be some distance away and there was nothing but rock and foaming water between, but when they reached a slacker place where the current circled around a deep basin Frank had four or five more minutes' fishing, during which he landed several trout. Then the flies seemed to vanish and there was scarcely a splash on the shadowy water.

"You may as well put the rod up," Harry advised. "It's a sure thing you won't get another."

Frank tried for a few minutes, but finding his companion's prediction justified, sat down near him among the roots of a big fir. At the foot of the pool where he had been fishing the stream swept furiously between

big scattered boulders in a wild white rapid. It was narrower there, and a ledge of rock, slightly hollowed out underneath, rose above it on the side on which they sat a little more than a hundred yards away. The woods were now darkening fast, and the chill of the dew was in the air, which was heavy with the scent of redwood and cedar. In places the water still glimmered faintly, and except for the roar it made, everything was very still.

Suddenly Harry pointed to the dog, who was lying near Frank.

"Get hold of him," he said in a low voice. "If nothing else will keep him quiet, we'll roll your jacket round his head."

Frank, who had taken off his jacket, which was badly torn, when he began fishing, laid his hand on the dog as it arose with a low growl. Then as it tried to break away from him he seized its collar and held on with all his might while Harry flung the jacket over it. Though the thing cost them an effort they managed to hold the animal still between them. In the meanwhile there was a crackle of undergrowth and Frank saw a man who walked in a rather curious manner move out from the shadow. Even when he was clear of the overhanging branches it was impossible to see him distinctly, but Frank recognized him with a start. There was something wrong with one of the dark figure's shoulders.

The man moved on away from them, until he stopped at the edge of the overhanging rock, where he stood for a moment or two. Then he leaped out suddenly and alighted on the top of a boulder about which the white froth whirled. Frank fancied that only a very powerful person could have safely made such a leap, and there was no doubt that whatever it was that had caused the man's unusual gait, it had not affected his agility. The next moment, he jumped again, and, coming down rather more than knee-deep in the rapid,



floundered through it and vanished into the shadow beneath the trees. Then Harry looked around at his companion with a smile.

"I'll own up that Barclay's smart, after all," he said. "He's sure on the trail. Anyway, perhaps we'd better head back to camp in case some more of them come along."

It was quite dark when they reached the fire the Siwash had made and found Mr. Barclay, who now seemed rather wet as well as ragged, sitting beside it with his pipe in his hand. When they had compared their fish with those he had killed they lay down among the withered needles on the opposite side of the fire.

"It's good fishing, sir, but you must be very keen to come so far for it," said Harry, looking up innocently at Mr. Barclay.

The red light of the fire was on Mr. Barclay's face and Frank saw that he glanced thoughtfully at Harry.

"It certainly is," he answered. "I believe you have already said something very much like your last remark. Still, you see, I don't propose to come often."

Frank suppressed a chuckle. If Harry had intended to surprise the man into some admission he had not succeeded yet.

"And we go on to the rancherie in a couple of days," Harry added. "From what the Indians told me I don't think we'd get any fishing there. Wouldn't it be better to stay here a little longer?"

"No," said Mr. Barclay, "quite apart from the difficulty of sending your father word, what you suggest doesn't strike me as advisable, for one or two reasons."

Harry seemed to realize that he was making no progress, and, looking meaningly at Frank, suddenly changed his tactics.

"There's something I should perhaps have told you, sir, though I don't know whether it will interest you. Anyway, not long ago Frank and I were up at the

Chinese colony behind the settlement near our ranch. Perhaps you have been there?"

"I've heard of it," said Barclay dryly.

Then in a few words Harry described how the man they had endeavored to trail had vanished at the Chinaman's shack, and Frank saw a look of eager interest cross Mr. Barclay's usually stolid face.

"You suggest that the fellow didn't want you to see him?" he asked.

"That was certainly how it struck me."

"And he walked rather curiously and one shoulder seemed a little higher than the other? I think you mentioned that?"

"I did," repeated Harry.

Mr. Barclay seemed to reflect, but there was now sign of deeper interest in his expression.

"Did you notice whether he had red hair and gray eyes?"

"No," said Harry with a grin, "though I can't be sure about it, I've a notion that his hair was dark. As it happened, I only saw his back, but I'd know the man again." He paused impressively. "In fact, I hadn't the least trouble about it when I saw him half an hour ago."

Mr. Barclay started and there was no doubt that he was astonished at this.

"You ran up against him here!"

"No," said Harry, "I only watched him from behind a fir. He crossed the creek heading south and didn't notice us."

Mr. Barclay settled back again and seemed lost in thought. "After all," he said shortly, "it's possible."

Then he changed the subject and they talked about fishing until the fire died down, when they spread their blankets upon their couches of soft spruce twigs.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SCHOONER REAPPEARS

IT was early in the evening when after a toilsome march Mr. Barclay and the boys reached a Siwash rancherie built just above high-water mark on the pebbly beach of a sheltered inlet. Frank had already discovered that the northern part of the Pacific Slope is a land of majestic beauty, but he had so far seen nothing quite so wild and rugged as the surroundings of the Indian dwelling. Behind it, a great rock fell almost sheer, leaving only room for a breadth of shingle between its feet and the strip of clear green water. On the opposite side mighty firs climbed the face of a towering hill so steep that Frank wondered how they clung to it, and at the head of the tremendous chasm a crystal stream came splashing out of eternal shadow. Seaward a wet reef guarded the inlet's mouth, with its outer edge hidden by spouts of snowy foam, upon which the big Pacific rollers broke continually, ranging up in tall green walls and crumbling upon the stony barrier with a deep vibratory roar which rang in long pulsations across the stately pines.

The rancherie was a long and rather ramshackle, single-storied, wooden building not unlike a frame barn, only lower, and Frank discovered that although it was inhabited by the whole Siwash colony there were no divisions in it, but each inmate or family claimed its allotted space upon the floor. A tall pole rudely carved with grotesque figures stood in front of it, and it occurred to Frank as he inspected them that he was face to face with the rudiments of heraldry. The nobles of ancient

Europe, he remembered, blazoned devices of this kind upon their shields, and their descendants still painted their lions and griffins and eagles upon their carriages and stamped them upon their note paper. He was probably right in his surmises, though there are different views upon the subject of totem poles, and the Siwash, who ought to know most about them, seem singularly unwilling to supply inquirers with any reliable information.

A group of brown-faced, black-haired men and women dressed much as white folks stood about the rancherie, and near them were ranged rows of shallow trays of bark containing drying berries. Frank noticed that the woods were full of the latter — hat berries, salmon berries, and splendid black and yellow raspberries. Several big sea canoes were drawn up at the edge of the water, and Mr. Oliver sat near one of them with another cluster of Siwash gathered about him. They had spread a number of peltries out upon the stones, which Mr. Oliver explained were seal skins. Frank examined one, and found it difficult to believe that this coarse, greasy, and nastily smelling hair was the material out of which the beautiful glossy furs were made. He confided his views to Harry.

"Yes," said the latter, "they're not much to look at now. They have to go through quite a lot of dressing, and I've heard that in the first place all the long outside hair is plucked out. There's an inner coat." He looked at the men. "It's done in England, isn't it?"

Mr. Barclay smiled. "A good deal of it is, anyway." Then he addressed Mr. Oliver. "You're buying some of these peltries?"

"One or two," was the answer. "We want an excuse for this visit."

Mr. Barclay made a sign of assent, and after chaffering with the Indians for a few moments Mr. Oliver broke in again: "They're cheap, that's sure. I suppose

these fellows would rather sell them on the spot for dollars down than pack them along down to Alberni or some other place where they'd probably have to take grocery stores in payment. If you're open to make a deal we'll take two or three between us. We ought to get our money back with something over in Victoria."

Mr. Oliver kept up the bargaining for a while, and then explained that he and his companion did not care for the rest of the skins, which were inferior to those they had chosen. One of the Siwash thereupon informed him that more canoes were expected in a day or two, adding that he would probably be able to show them further peltries if they could wait their arrival.

"Tell him we'll stay," said Mr. Barclay. "At the same time you had better ask him if there's any likelihood of our getting down to Victoria by water. You can say we've had about enough crawling through the bush—it's a fact that *I* have—and lead up to the question naturally."

Frank, observing a twinkle in Harry's eyes, watched the Indians' faces when Mr. Oliver addressed them, but they remained perfectly expressionless.

"I can't get anything out of them about the schooner," Mr. Oliver reported at length. "This fellow says the easiest way would be to send our Indians back for the canoe, which I'll do. It's possible that we may chance upon a little more information later on."

"Where do they get the skins?" Frank asked presently, when the Indians had left them.

"That's a point they don't seem much inclined to talk about," Mr. Barclay answered. "They probably follow them in their canoes as they work up north, though it's only odd seals they pick up in that way. The principal supply comes from the Pribyloff Islands up in the Bering Sea. It's supposed that with the exception of a few which frequent some reefs lying nearer Russian Asia practically all the seals in the North

Pacific haul out there for two or three months every year. The American lessees club them on the land, but the crews of the Canadian schooners kill a number in open water outside our limit. They claim that although the seals are born on American beaches we don't own them when they're in the sea, but, as it's suggested that they're not always very particular about their exact distance from the islands, their proceedings make trouble every now and then. I'm talking about the fur seals; there are several other kinds which are more or less common everywhere."

He broke off and sat smoking silently for a while, looking at the skins.

"They seem to have taken your fancy," Mr. Oliver observed presently.

"It's a fact," Mr. Barclay assented. "I was just thinking I'd like to take that big one and the other yonder home with me. My daughter Minnie visits East in the winter now and then, and she's fond of furs, though so far I haven't been able to buy her any particularly smart ones. There's a man I know in Portland who can fix up a skin as well as any one in London. He was a good many years in Alaska trading furs for the A. C. C., and some of the Russians who stayed behind there taught him to dress them."

Mr. Oliver laughed. "I suppose the thing is quite out of the question?"

"It is," said Mr. Barclay dryly. "You ought to know that the United States charges a big duty on foreign furs."

"On foreign ones!" broke in Harry, nudging Frank. "A seal born on an American beach could certainly be considered an American seal."

"When you import goods into the United States you require a certificate of origin, young man."

"That fixes the thing," said Harry. "On your own

showing, those seals originated on the Pribyloffs. They're American."

"Ingenious!" exclaimed Mr. Barclay, with a longing glance at the skins. "There's some reason in that contention, but won't you go on? You don't seem to have got through yet."

"In case you felt justified in taking a skin or two," continued Harry thoughtfully, "I'd like to point out that, as a rule, the Customs fellows don't trouble about a sloop the size of ours. We just run up to our moorings when we come back from a yachting trip, and there's a nice little nook forward which would just hold a bundle of those peltries. It's hidden beneath the second cable."

Mr. Barclay picked up a piece of shingle and flung it at him.

"You can stop right now before you get yourself into difficulties. What do you mean by proposing a smuggling deal to a man connected with the United States revenue?"

"I'm sorry," Harry answered with a chuckle. "I should have waited until the rest had gone."

Mr. Barclay regarded him severely, though his eyes twinkled.

"Your smartness is going to make trouble for you by and by," he said. "Go and see what that Siwash is doing about our supper."

Harry moved away, but presently came back to announce that the meal was ready. When it was over the boys strolled off toward the reef, leaving the men sitting smoking on the beach.

"That boy of yours told me what seemed a rather curious thing last night," said Mr. Barclay, and he briefly ran over what Harry had related about the man with the peculiar shoulder.

Mr. Oliver listened in evident astonishment.

"It's the first time I've heard of the matter," he exclaimed. "What do you make of it?"

"In the meanwhile I don't quite know what to think. If that man is boss of the gang it explains a good deal that has been puzzling me, but I must own it's considerably more than I expected. The general idea was that he'd cleared out of the country, which would have been a very natural course in view of the fact that he'd probably have been sandbagged if he'd show himself after dark on any wharf of two of the coast states. Anyway, your son's description was quite straight. He seemed sure of him."

"Harry's eyes are as good as yours or mine," said Mr. Oliver with a smile. Mr. Barclay wrinkled his brow.

"There's a point that struck me—though I can't say if it explains the thing. The boy's only young yet, he has imagination and, it's possible, a fondness for detective literature, like the rest of them. Now we'll assume that he had heard of a certain sensational case—a particularly gruesome crime on board an American ship—and the arrest of the rascal accused of it. I needn't point out that the fellow only escaped on a technical point of law and that his picture figured in some of the papers. Isn't that the kind of thing that's likely to make a marked impression on the youthful mind?"

"I can see two objections," responded Mr. Oliver. "In the first place, Harry was away in Idaho while the case was going on. The second one's more important. Harry might try to put the laugh on you, as he did not long ago, but when he makes a concise statement it's to be relied upon. In such a case I've never known him to let his imagination run away with him."

Mr. Barclay spread his hands out in a deprecatory manner.

"Then we'll take the thing for granted, and it certainly

simplifies the affair. I'd no trouble in finding the Chinese colony, and though I've no idea how they get the dope, that doesn't matter. The point is that it's very seldom anybody is likely to disturb them in this part of the bush, and there are two inlets handy. A schooner could slip in here a dozen times without being noticed by anybody except the Siwash. Then we have the fact that a notorious rascal who has evidently a hand in the thing was seen heading for the Chinese colony. It seems to me decisive."

"What are you going to do about it?" Mr. Oliver asked.

"Wait and keep my eyes open. If it appears advisable I may communicate with the Canadian authorities later on, though, of course, we must contrive to get our hands on the fellows in American waters. I've an idea it can be done."

Mr. Oliver said nothing further, and by and by, when a thin haze rolled down from the hillside and night closed in, they strolled toward the rancherie, where they were given a strip of floor space not far from the entrance. The boys came in a little later and lay down apart from them and nearer the door, but Frank did not go to sleep. The rancherie was hot and the dull roar of the combers on the reef came throbbing in and made him restless. He lay still for what seemed a considerable time, and at last there was a low sound which might have been made by somebody rising stealthily, after which a dim black object flitted out of the door. Then Harry, who lay close to him, touched his arm.

"Are you asleep?" he asked very softly.

"No," answered Frank. "Where's that fellow going?"

"Get out as quietly as you can," was Harry's reply.

Frank had kept his shirt and trousers on, and after feeling for his boots he arose cautiously, holding them

in his hand. In another moment or two he had slipped out into the cool night air and was crossing the shingle in his stockinged feet. Once or twice a stone rattled, but he supposed the sound was lost in the clamor of the reef, for nobody seemed to hear it. When they had left the rancherie some distance behind they sat down.

"Now," said Harry, "I'll tell you my idea. They're expecting the schooner and don't want her to run in while we're about. They've probably had a man on the lookout down by the entrance, and I expect the fellow who went out has been sent by the boss or Tyee to learn if the other one has seen her."

"It's curious some of them didn't hear us," Frank observed thoughtfully.

"I'm not sure that they didn't," Harry admitted. "Anyway, they couldn't stop us without some excuse, and, if I'm right, they certainly wouldn't want to tell us why they wished us to stay in. Of course," he added, "it might make them suspicious, but I don't know any reason why we should point that out to Barclay. The great thing is to keep out of sight in case they follow us."

They put on their boots and crept along in the gloom beneath the rock, heading toward the reefs. A little breeze blew down the hollow, setting the dark firs to sighing, and part of the inlet lay black in their shadow. The rest sparkled in the light of a half-moon which had just risen above the crest of the hill. They could hear the soft splash and tinkle of water rippling among the stones, but now and then this sound was drowned as the roar of the reef grew louder and deeper. Presently a dim, filmy whiteness in front of them resolved itself into a glimmering spray cloud and fountains of spouting foam, and when at length they stopped among a cluster of wet boulders they could see a black ridge of rock thrusting itself out, half buried, into a mad turmoil of frothing water. It lay in the shadow of the rock, and there was

no moonlight on the ghostly combers which came seething down upon it. A little outshore, however, the sea sparkled with a silvery radiance except where the shadow of a black head fell upon it. There was not more than a moderate breeze, but the Pacific surge breaks upon and roars about those reefs continually.

A little thrill ran through Frank as he leaned upon one of the wet boulders. It was the first time he had trodden a Pacific beach, and he realized that he had now reached the outermost verge of the West. He could go no farther. The ocean barred his progress, and beyond it lay different lands, whose dark-skinned peoples spoke in other tongues. The white man's civilization stopped short where he stood. Then as he watched the ceaseless shoreward rush of the big combers and looked up at black rock and climbing pines, a strange delight in the new life he led crept into his heart. Dusky shadow and silvery moonlight seemed filled with glamour, and he was learning to love the wilderness as he could never have loved the cities. Besides, he was there to watch for the mysterious schooner, and that alone was sufficient to stir him and put a tension on his nerves. It was more than possible that there were other watchers hidden somewhere in the gloom.

He did not know how long they waited, with the salt spray stinging their faces and the diapason of the surf in their ears, but at last she came, breaking upon his sight suddenly and strangely, as he felt it was most fitting that she should do. Her black headsails swept out of the shadow of the neighboring head, the tall boom-foresail followed, and a second later he saw the greater spread of her after canvas. She drove on, growing larger, into a strip of moonlight, when, for the wind was off the shore, he saw her hull hove up on the side toward him, with the water flashing beneath it and frothing white at her bows.

"She's close-hauled," said Harry. "They'll stretch

across to the other side and then put the helm down and let her reach in. It's a mighty awkward place to make when the wind's blowing out."

She plunged once more into the shadow, but Frank could still see her more or less plainly — a tall, slanted mass of canvas flitting swiftly through the dusky blueness of the night. She edged close in with the reef, still carrying everything except her main gaff-topsail, and then as her headsails swept across the entrance the splash of a paddle reached the boys faintly through the clamor of the surf and they heard a hoarse shout.

"There's a canoe yonder," announced Harry. "The Siwash in her is hailing them. They've heard him. Her peak's coming down."

A clatter of blocks broke out and the upper half of the tall mainsail suddenly collapsed. Then the schooner's bows swung around a little until they pointed to the seething froth upon the opposite beach.

"What are they doing?" Frank asked. "She's going straight ashore."

Harry laughed excitedly. "No," he said, "that Siwash has told them to clear out again, and it will want smart work to get her round in this narrow water. They've dropped the mainsail peak because she wouldn't fall off fast enough."

Frank watched her eagerly for the next moment or two. Her bows were swinging around, but they were swinging slowly, and the beach with the white surf upon it seemed ominously close ahead. He saw two black figures go scrambling forward and haul the stay-sail to windward, but she was still forging across the inlet. Then her bows fell off a little farther, the trailing gaff swung out with a bang, and Frank saw the masts fall into line with him and a bent figure behind the deckhouse struggling with the wheel. In another moment her mainsail came over with a crash and she was flitting out to sea again.

"Now," cried Harry, "back up the beach for your life! We're going in swimming!"

"You can do what you like," grunted Frank. "I'm heading straight for the rancherie."

"After the swim," urged Harry. "Get a move on and loose your things as you run. I'll explain later."

He ran on, flinging off his clothes, and plunged into the water when they drew near the rancherie. In another moment or two Frank waded in after him and was glad he had done so when he heard the soft splash of a canoe paddle somewhere in the gloom. He fancied that the Siwash would see them, which, as he realized, was what Harry had desired. They were some distance from the mouth of the inlet and he did not think the schooner would have been visible from the spot, which led him to believe that if the Indians had noticed their absence their present occupation might serve as an excuse for it.

He did not see the canoe reach the beach, but in two or three minutes Harry suggested that they might as well go out, and putting on some of their clothes they made for the rancherie. Creeping into it softly, they lay down and soon afterward went to sleep.

CHAPTER XIV

A TEST OF ENDURANCE

THE boys were sitting on the beach next morning after breakfast when Mr. Oliver looked across at Harry, who had not yet said anything about their adventures.

"What were you two doing last night?" he asked casually.

Harry started. "Then you heard us?"

"I did," said his father. "You were out of the door before I quite realized what was going on, and it didn't seem altogether wise to commence talking when you came back, but that's not the point. You haven't answered my question."

"We went in swimming," Harry informed him with a grin.

"Considering that most people would prefer to swim in daylight, I wonder if you had any particular reason for choosing the middle of the night?" mused Mr. Oliver thoughtfully.

"Why, yes," was Harry's answer. "I've a notion it was rather a good one. I wanted the Siwash to see us in the water, because it would explain the thing. There were at least two of them about the beach, though only one left the rancherie after we came into it."

"Then the fellow must have gone out a good deal more quietly than you did, because I didn't hear him. I suppose you felt you had to get after him and see what he was doing?"

Mr. Barclay smiled and waved his hand.

"Sure," he broke in. "The temptation would be irre-

sistible. What else would you expect from two enterprising youngsters like these, who have no doubt been studying detective literature and the exploits of other young men in the brave old jayhawking days?"

A flush crept into Harry's face, but he answered quietly:

"Well, it's perhaps as well we went, because I can tell you what the Siwash were watching for. We saw the schooner."

Mr. Barclay gave a sudden start and cast a significant glance at Mr. Oliver.

"The dramatic climax! There's no doubt you have sprung it upon us smartly, but now you have worked it off you can go ahead with the tale."

Harry told him what they had seen and when he had finished Mr. Barclay seemed to be considering the matter ponderously. Then he turned to Mr. Oliver.

"It seems to me there's nothing more to keep us here."

"No," said the rancher. "On the other hand, it might, perhaps, be better if we waited until those canoes arrive—if it's only for the look of the thing."

His companion made a sign of agreement and neither one said anything further on the subject. The boys lounged about the beach and gathered delicious berries in the woods most of the day, and on the following day two more canoes ran in. Their crews had, however, traded off their peltries somewhere else, and shortly after their arrival Mr. Oliver and his party left the inlet in the canoe which he had sent the Indians back to bring. The weather had changed in the night, and when they paddled down the strip of sheltered water their ears were filled with the clamor of the surf, and the hillsides were lost in thin drizzle and sliding mist. A filmy spray cloud hung about the entrance, and beyond it big, gray combers tipped with froth came rolling up in long succession. The sight of them affected Frank disagreeably, and he was not astonished when Mr. Oliver, who

spoke to one of the Indians, suggested that he and Harry had better help with the spare paddles until they were far enough off shore to get the masts up.

Frank found it hard enough work, for the sea was almost ahead and the canoe lurched viciously, pitching her bows out. The crag beyond the inlet, however, still slightly sheltered them, and straining at the paddle with the rain in their faces they made shift to drive her over the big, gray-sided ridges, though every now and then the frothing top of one came splashing in. At length one of the Siwash lifted the short mast forward into its place, and thrusting in the sprit, shook loose the sail. His companion, who knelt aft gripping a long-bladed paddle, seized the sheet, and the craft, gathering speed, headed out toward the point to lee of them. When she had cleared it the Siwash raised a second mast farther aft, and setting the sail upon it, slacked both sheets, after which the canoe drove away at what seemed to Frank an astonishing pace. As a matter of fact, she was traveling very fast, for a narrow, shallow-bodied craft of that kind is very speedy so long as the wind is more or less behind her.

Sitting with his back against her hove-up weather side he noticed rather uneasily that the opposite one was almost level with the brine. Then he glanced astern at the combers that followed them, and was by no means comforted by the sight. They were unlike the short, tumbling waves he had seen already in land-locked water, for they were larger and longer, and swept up with a kind of stately swing until they broke into seething foam. Their rise and fall seemed measured, and they rolled on in their ceaseless march in well-ordered ranks. It struck him that the canoe was carrying a dangerous press of sail, but nobody else appeared disturbed, and he admitted that the Indians probably knew how much it was safe to spread.

"Isn't she making a great pace?" he asked of Mr. Oliver, who sat nearest him.

"Yes," was the answer, "I've made two or three trips in these canoes, but I never saw one driven quite so hard. These fellows are probably afraid the breeze will freshen up, and want to get as far as possible before it does."

They ran on for a couple of hours, seeing nothing but the ranks of tumbling combers, except at intervals when the haze thinned a little and they made out a shadowy mass which might have been high and rocky land over the port side. In the meanwhile the seas were steadily getting bigger, and a good deal of water came in at irregular intervals. By and by, the boys were kept busy bailing it out, and the Indian who was not steering held the sheet of the larger sail.

At length, when the tops of two or three seas splashed in over the foam-washed stern in quick succession, the helmsman raised his hand and there was a wild thrashing as his companion loosened the after-sheet. Rolling the sail together he flung the mast down, and the canoe ran on with only the forward one set, which seemed to Frank quite sufficient. The sea was on her quarter, and each comber that came up boiled about her in a great surge of foam, and heaved her up before it left her to sink dizzily into the hollow. Each time she did so Frank was conscious of a curious and unpleasant feeling in his interior.

He had, however, no difficulty in eating his share of the crackers and canned provisions Mr. Oliver presently handed around, and after that he was kept too busy bailing to notice anything until late in the afternoon when he heard the two Indians muttering to one another. The result of the discussion was that one of them pulled the sprit out, and folding down the peak left only a small three-cornered strip of sail. Frank under-

stood the cause for this when he glanced at the seas, which looked alarmingly big. It was disconcerting to realize that they could take no more sail off the canoe unless they lowered the mast altogether, and where the beach was he could not tell. He had seen no sign of it for the last two hours, and it was now raining viciously hard.

Nobody seemed inclined to talk, and there was only the roar and splash of the combers behind them as they drove wildly on, until when dusk was close at hand the dim shadow of a hill rose up suddenly on one side of them. Then the Indian hauled the sheet, and presently when the water became smoother, called to his companion, who thrust the sprit up again. After that the canoe put her lee side in every now and then, but very soon a foam-fringed point stretched out ahead. They swept around it, and after skirting a half-seen, rocky beach ran with spritsail thrashing into a little basin down to which there crept rows of mist-wrapped trees.

Frank was thankful to get out when the helmsman ran her ashore, and the work of assisting the Indians to chop branches and make a fire put a little warmth into him. They made supper when darkness closed down, and afterward the Indians erected a rude branch-and-bark shelter, while the white men and the boys huddled together in the tent. It was better than sitting in the foam-swept canoe, but Frank longed for the sloop's low-roofed cabin.

He went to sleep, however, wet as he was, and after an early breakfast next morning they started again, with both spritsails up in torrential rain. The water was comparatively smooth, though the doleful moaning of the firs fell from the half-seen hills, and Mr. Oliver announced that the entrance to the canal they had come down was not far away. Frank had learned that on

the Pacific Slope canal generally means a natural arm of the sea.

They reached its entrance presently, sailing close-hauled, and on stretching across it the canoe plunged viciously on a short, white-topped sea. The wind was blowing straight down the deep rift in the hills, and Frank remembered with regret that Alberni stood a long way up at the head of the inlet. They came back on the other tack, making almost nothing, and the Siwash pulled the masts down before one of them spoke to Mr. Oliver.

"I suppose they can't get the canoe to windward?" suggested Mr. Barclay.

"He says we'll have to paddle," Mr. Oliver answered. "There seem to be four paddles in her and that will leave two of us to relieve the rest in turn."

Harry and Frank took the first spell with the Indians, and they had had enough of it before an hour had passed. The wind was dead ahead of them, and though they crept in close with the beach they were met by little, spiteful seas. It was necessary to fight for every fathom, thrashing her slowly ahead by sheer force of muscle. Frank's hands were soon sore and one knee raw from pressing it against the craft's bottom. He got hot and breathless, the rain was in his face, and his side began to ache, and it was a vast relief to him when Mr. Oliver finally took his place.

The mists were thinning when he sat down limply in the bottom of the craft, and great rocky hills and dusky firs crawled slowly by, except when now and then a fiercer gust swept down, whitening all the inlet, and they barely held their own by desperate paddling. Then as it dropped a little they forged ahead again. It was dreary as well as very arduous work, but there was no avoiding it, for their provisions were almost gone and there was no trail of any kind through the bush. Frank

felt that even paddling into a strong head wind was better than smashing through continuous thorny brakes and floundering over great fallen logs.

One hand commenced to bleed when he next took his turn, but that was, as he realized, not a matter of much importance. They had to reach Alberni sometime next day, and his chief concern was how it could be done. Then the pain in his side set in again and became rapidly worse, and he set his lips tight as he swung gasping with each stroke of the splashing blade. They won a foot or so each time the paddles came down, and it was somewhat consoling to recognize it. He felt that if he had been called upon to do this kind of thing after sleeping wet through upon the ground when he first came out he would have immediately collapsed, but he was steadily acquiring the power to disregard bodily fatigue.

There was no change as the day slipped by. It rained pitilessly, and the wind continually headed them as they labored on wearily with set, wet faces and straining muscles. The stroke must not slacken, for the moment it grew feebler the canoe would drive astern. They kept it up until nightfall, and then beaching the canoe lay down once more in the tent, which strained in the wind. They were aching all over when they rose next morning, and the work was still the same, but they reached Alberni, worn out, early in the evening. It was a very small place then, though it afterward sprang up into a mining town. Two or three ranch houses stood in their clearings beside a crystal river, and a few more buildings clustered at the head of the inlet half hidden in the bush. There was a store and a frame hotel among them, and Mr. Oliver, who took up quarters in the latter, told the boys that the stage would start on the following morning. The Indians were given shelter in one of the outbuildings, and the hotelkeeper insisted on locking up the dog, who growled at everybody about the place.

"I'm not scared of dogs," he explained, "but that one of yours won't let me get about my own house. Besides, I guess he'd eat some of those Chinamen before morning if you leave him loose."

They were standing near a window, and Mr. Oliver glanced at one or two blue-clad figures lounging under the dripping trees.

"You seem to have a number of them about," he remarked. "I saw another lot as I came in. What are they doing here?"

"Stopping for the night," was the answer. "They're camping in a barn of mine and going on to the gold creek at sun-up, though they may start earlier if the rain stops. Quite a few of them have come in over the trail lately."

"Then there must be a regular colony in the bush," broke in Mr. Barclay, who had strolled up.

"No," replied the hotelkeeper, "that's the curious thing. They keep on coming in by threes and fours, but Blake from the ranch higher up the river was through that way not long ago, and he said he didn't see many of them yonder. About two dozen, he figured, but more than that have come through here to my certain knowledge."

"It looks as if the gold-washing didn't pay and the rest had gone on somewhere," Mr. Barclay suggested carelessly.

The hotelkeeper looked bewildered. "Well," he said, "this is the only trail to the settlements, and they certainly haven't come back this way. It's mighty rough traveling through the bush, as you ought to know."

Mr. Barclay smiled ruefully as he glanced down at his torn clothing and badly damaged boots. "That's a sure thing. Besides, they'd have their truck to pack along, which would make it more difficult. Those fellows generally bring a lot of odds and ends with them."

"Oh, yes," assented the hotelkeeper. "Most of them

have their slung baskets on poles. Anyway, I've no fault to find with them. They make no trouble."

He walked off, and when Mr. Barclay and Mr. Oliver went out, Harry gave a triumphant glance at Frank.

"Now," he said, "you see what our friend has found out without giving himself away. The question is, where do those Chinamen who don't stay with the gold-washing get to?"

Frank laughed. "I expect Barclay could give you an answer. There's another thing he could probably guess at, and that's what they've got in some of those slung baskets."

Then they moved back toward the lighted stove, for the rain drove against the frame walls and it was damp and chilly in the big bare room.

CHAPTER XV

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR

IT was getting dark when the boys retired to their room, in which two beds were standing at opposite corners. Harry chose the one nearest the door, and they left the window open. The room was, as usual in such places, very scantily furnished, but it appeared very comfortable after their camps in the dripping bush, and Frank found it a luxury to get his clothes off and lie down upon a comparatively soft mattress.

A draught blew in at intervals through the window, and the door, which would not shut, swung to and fro. It was raining as hard as ever, for Frank could hear a muffled roar upon the shingled roof, and the pines outside were wailing dolefully. He soon went to sleep, however, but was awakened later by the sound of voices and a soft patter of feet below. The rain seemed to have stopped at last, though he could hear a heavy splashing from the branches of the firs close by, and he fancied that the Chinamen must be starting. There was, however, no sign of morning when he glanced toward the window, which showed only as a faintly lighter square in the surrounding obscurity. In fact, it seemed unusually dark, which struck him as curious, since there was a moon, but the hotel stood in a valley shrouded by giant trees and he supposed that the sky was thick with cloud.

He heard the voices grow fainter and the footsteps gradually recede until they were lost in the moaning of the pines, and he felt that he did not envy the Chinamen their journey. He wondered why they had not

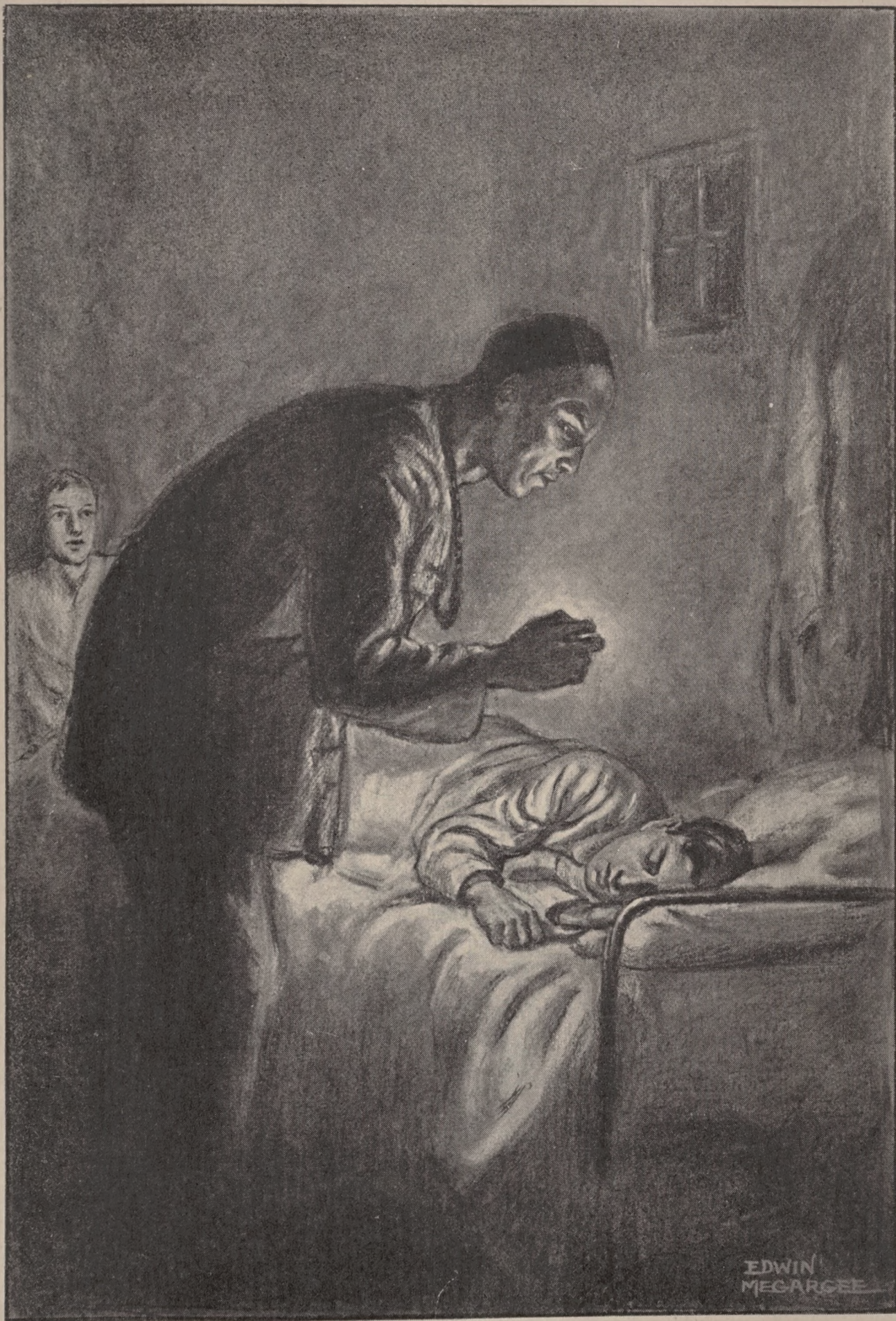
waited until sunrise before starting, and then remembered that a rancher he had met had told him that a trail led out of the settlement for some distance. He supposed it would be light before the Chinamen should reach the end of it and plunge into the forest. About a quarter of an hour had slipped away when, lying half asleep, he thought that he heard some one in the room. He could see nothing but the window, and could hear little else than the sound of the wind among the trees, but raising himself very cautiously on one elbow he distinctly heard a faint sound that suggested a stealthy movement. This seemed very curious, for he felt almost certain that if his companion had had any idea of trying to find out something about the Chinamen he would have told him, besides which, the Chinamen had gone.

While he lay still listening with tingling nerves there was a soft scraping and presently a very pale blue flame broke out, showing a shadowy figure in a loose robe bending over Harry's bed with a light in its hand. Frank did not pause to consider what the stranger's intentions might be, but reached for his boot, which was a heavy one, and flung it with all his might at the shadowy object's head. It struck the boarded wall with a startling crash, the light suddenly went out, and he sprang from his bed in the darkness with a cry of "Harry!"

"Well," said his companion drowsily, "what's the matter?"

"Where's the Chinaman?" shouted Frank, darting toward the door.

He ran out into a passage with Harry blundering half awake behind him, and noticed that there was an open window near the door which had been shut when he had last seen it. On reaching it he espied what seemed to be the roof of a low outbuilding not far below, but there was very little else to be seen except the loom of the dusky pines which were beginning to stand out



“A SHADOWY FIGURE IN A LOOSE ROBE BENT OVER HARRY’S
BED”—*Page 158*

against the sky. Then he heard a rush of pattering feet and a yelp on the stairway close by, and a furry body flung itself against his knee. He recognized the dog, who almost immediately darted into the room. It came out again, sprang to the window ledge, and bounded to the roof beneath. He heard a soft thud on the shingles and a bark that sounded farther off, and then for a moment or two there was silence again.

It was broken by the sound of a door flung open, and Mr. Barclay came along the passage very lightly dressed, with a lamp in his hand. Telling them to follow, he walked into the boys' room, and placed the lamp on a bureau before he sat down on the nearest bed.

"Now," he asked, "what's the cause of this commotion?"

"I don't know," said Harry. "Perhaps Frank can tell you. He seems to have been throwing his boots about."

Frank, a little nettled, narrated what he had seen. Mr. Barclay smiled.

"You say the man was standing by Harry's bed," he observed. "Did you notice if he had a big knife in his hand?"

"He'd nothing but a match," Frank answered shortly.

"Now that's curious," said Mr. Barclay. "Do you suppose he meant to set the bed on fire, or have you any idea what he was doing?"

Frank heard a slight sound and looking around saw Mr. Oliver standing in the doorway, while just then a shout came down the passage, apparently from the hotelkeeper.

"What's the trouble? Is there anything wrong?"

"We're trying to find out," Mr. Barclay replied. "It doesn't seem to be serious, anyway."

"Then I'll put a few clothes on before I come along," said the voice, and a door banged.

"He seemed to be looking down at Harry's face,"

said Frank, who saw that Mr. Barclay was waiting an answer.

Mr. Barclay now turned and favored Harry with a critical gaze.

"I can't understand what the fellow wanted to do that for." Then he smiled back at Frank. "These are decadent days. He wouldn't have got away with his scalp on if he'd come creeping into the room of the James boys."

Harry flushed. "I suppose you mean to hint that Frank imagined it all, sir? Well, he told you the man struck a match, and though sulphur matches don't give much light they make a considerable smell. Do you notice any particular odor in this room?" Then he stooped suddenly and picked up a half-burned match. "What do you make of this? I haven't struck one."

Mr. Barclay examined the match with an abstracted expression, and while he did so the dog pattered into the room wagging his tail in a deprecatory manner, as if to excuse himself for not overtaking the intruder. He jumped distractedly around the boys for a moment and then crouched down upon the floor with a short length of broken cord trailing from his collar. Mr. Oliver pointed to it with an amused smile.

"It seems to me the dog must have imagined something of the same kind as Frank did," he observed.

By this time the hotelkeeper arrived and gazed on with astonishment while Mr. Barclay briefly explained the cause of the commotion.

"I've never heard anything like this since I've been in the place," he declared. "The Chinamen are out on the trail now. Better see if you have lost anything."

The couple of dollars that Frank had brought with him proved to be still in his pocket, and Harry fished out the dollar which belonged to him. His cheap watch was safe beneath his pillow, and Frank declared that he had left his silver one at the ranch. This appeared

to make the matter more inexplicable to the hotelkeeper.

"If the fellow had gone off with something, I could have understood it," he said in a puzzled way.

"It's most likely that Frank saw him almost immediately after he came in," said Mr. Oliver. "As he pitched his boot at him, the man was probably startled and got out without wasting any time in looking round. Then the dog broke loose and went after him."

The hotelkeeper agreed with this and shortly afterward Mr. Oliver, telling the boys not to trouble themselves any further about the matter, followed him out with Mr. Barclay. They turned into the latter's room, where Mr. Oliver sat down.

"I imagine that Frank's notion is correct," he said. "As Harry told you, he and Frank once paid a visit to the Chinese camp near our ranch where he saw the man with the high shoulder and followed him to a shack from which he disappeared. If the Chinaman who crept into the room chanced to have been about the camp when the boys were there, it's quite possible that he did wish to see Harry's face."

"That," Mr. Barclay admitted, "is my own opinion, though it seemed wiser not to impress it on the boys. I don't suppose you want them to get to making any investigations on their own account?"

"No," rejoined Mr. Oliver. "On the other hand, they've taken a certain part in the matter already. In fact, it might have been better if I'd left them behind. The trouble is that if the Chinaman recognized Harry it would probably give him some idea as to why we made this visit."

Mr. Barclay nodded his head. "Yes," he said. "It's a pity, but, after all, I'm rather glad I made this trip. It's going to prove worth while."

Nothing further was said on the subject and silence settled down again on the hotel. There was bright sunshine when the party started with the stage next

morning, and after spending the night at a little colliery town they took the train south. Getting off at a small station they found the sloop safe in the cove where they had left her. Mr. Barclay, however, went on with the peltries to Victoria, which was not far away, and there managed to dispose of them, after which he hired a horse and rode back to the inlet. They set sail as soon as he arrived, and after two days of light winds duly reached the cove near the ranch.

A few months slipped by peacefully. The smugglers showed no sign of further activity, and Mr. Oliver got his oat crop in undisturbed. One way or another he kept the boys busy from morning until night, but at last when the maple leaves were beginning to turn he told them to take their rifles and go hunting, and they set off one morning after breakfast.

It was a still, clear morning, and now that the fall was drawing on there was a change in the bush. Here and there a maple leaf caught a ray of sunshine and burned like a crimson lamp, the fern was growing yellow, and the undergrowth was splashed and spattered with flecks of varying color. Even the light in the openings seemed different. It was at once softer and clearer than the glare of summer, and the shadows seemed thinner and bluer than they had been. But there was no difference in the great black firs. They lifted their fretted spires high against the sky, as they had done for centuries, and they would remain the same until the white man's ax should sweep the wilderness away.

The boys were floundering waist-deep in withered fern and tangled undergrowth when they heard a rustling and scurrying somewhere near their feet, and Harry, breaking off a rotten branch from a fallen fir, hurled it into a neighboring thicket.

"A fool hen!" he shouted. "Jump round this bush, and try to put it up."

Frank fell into the thicket in his haste, but he still

heard the scurrying in front of him when he scrambled to his feet. He kicked a clump of fern, and there was no doubt that something rushed away from underneath it, after which he plunged through the brake with Harry some yards away on one side of him, but there was nothing visible. They hunted the unseen creature for what he supposed was about ten minutes with no better result. Then a plainly colored bird about the size of a pigeon rose from almost under his feet and flew to a fir branch some twenty yards away, where it perched and looked down at its pursuers unconcernedly.

"It doesn't seem scared now," said Frank in astonishment.

"It isn't," Harry answered with a laugh. "The thing feels quite safe once it's on a branch. I guess that's why it's called the fool hen, though its proper name is the willow grouse. Walk up and try a shot at it — only you must cut its head off."

Frank crept up nearer with a caution which was wholly unnecessary, for the bird did not seem to mind him in the least when he stopped close beneath it and pitched his rifle to his shoulder, but as he gazed at it over the half-moon of the rearsight it seemed to him that its neck was exceedingly small. He could not keep the forehead fixed on it, and bringing the rifle down he rested before he tried it again. Then he felt the butt thump his shoulder and the barrel jerk, and a little wisp of smoke drifted across his eyes and hung about the bushes. When it cleared, the grouse, to his astonishment, was sitting on the branch as calmly as ever.

"It likes it," said Harry. "Try again — only at its neck."

Trying again, Frank succeeded in inducing the bird to move to a neighboring branch, after which he braced himself with desperate determination for the third attempt. This time the jar upon his shoulder was fol-

lowed by a soft thud, and he understood why he had been warned to shoot only at its neck when he picked up his victim. The big .44 bullet had horribly shattered it.

"Could *you* have shot its head off?" he asked after he had thrown it down in disgust.

"Why, yes," said Harry. "Anyway, I can generally manage it if the thing sits still. Most of the bush ranchers could do it every time."

He made this good presently when they found another bird, for it dropped at his first shot without its head. Half an hour later they saw a blue grouse perched rather high up in a cedar.

"This fellow won't sit to be fired at," Harry explained. "Better try it kneeling where you are, if you can get the foresight up enough."

Frank knelt with his right foot tucked under him and his left elbow on his knee. It steadied the rifle considerably, but he had to cramp himself a little to raise the muzzle. Holding his breath he squeezed the trigger when a part of the bird filled up the curve of the rear sight, but he was mildly astonished when Harry walked toward him with the grouse in his hand.

"I guess this one could be cooked," he said dubiously. "We'll take it along."

Frank surveyed his victim with a thrill of pride. It was larger than the willow grouse. In fact, it seemed to him a remarkably big and handsome bird in spite of the hole in it, and he thrust it into the flour bag on his back with unalloyed satisfaction.

"Is this the thing that makes the drumming in the spring?" he asked.

Harry said that it was, and they scrambled through the bush for a couple of hours without seeing anything further, until they approached a swampy hollow with a steep hillside over which the undergrowth hung unusually thick.

"There ought to be a black bear yonder; they like the wild cabbage," said Harry. "We'll try to crawl in. It's a pity there isn't a little wind ahead of us."

They spent half an hour over the operation, and Frank realized that trailing had its drawbacks when he found that it entailed burrowing among thorny thickets and crawling across quaggy places on his hands and knees. In spite of his caution sticks would snap and it seemed to his strung-up imagination that he was making a prodigious noise. At last, however, there was another sound some distance in front of him which suddenly became louder.

"A bear, sure," cried Harry excitedly. "Going off up hill. Shoot if you can see it."

Frank gazed intently ahead, but could see absolutely nothing, though he could hear a smashing and crashing which presently died away again on the slope. Then Harry brought down his rifle and turned away.

"You can generally hear a black bear," he said. "He goes straight and rips right through the things a deer would jump. He's a kind of harmless beast, anyway."

"Could we find a deer?" Frank asked, his hopes still high.

"We'll try when we've had dinner," replied his companion. "I haven't seen any lately, though that doesn't count for much, because it would be possible not to notice one if the woods were full of them. Still, they seem to have a way of clearing right out of the country every now and then for no particular reason. The bear and the timber wolves do the same thing."

They ate their dinner sitting among the roots of a big cedar, while a gorgeous green and red woodpecker climbed about a neighboring trunk. Then Harry stood up and shouldered his rifle.

"After this we'll leave the birds alone," he announced. "You don't want to make a noise when you're trailing deer."

CHAPTER XVI

FRANK KILLS A DEER

THEY plodded through the bush for an hour or two without seeing any living thing except a few pigeons, and Harry began to look doubtful.

"If it was early morning, I'd try one of the rock outcrops where nothing grows," he observed. "The deer get up on to those places out of the dew then. As it's afternoon, I don't know which way to head."

Frank glanced at his clothes. Keen as he was on hunting, he would not have been sorry to head for home, for his duck trousers were badly torn and one of his boots which had been rather the worse for wear when he started was almost dropping off his foot. They trudged on, however, and accident favored them, as it often does when one is hunting, for at last when they were in very thick bush Harry dropped suddenly behind a patch of withered fern.

"Look there!" he said softly. "Right ahead of you yonder."

Frank gazed ahead with straining eyes, but he could only see the great trunks stretching back in serried ranks. He had heard somewhat to his astonishment that it is not often that a novice can see a deer in the bush even when it is pointed out to him, but now, it seemed, the thing was true. He could have declared that there was not a deer anywhere within the range of his vision.

"Right in front," whispered Harry, impatiently. "About seventy yards off. Oh, look yonder!"

He stretched his hand out and at last Frank noticed what seemed to be a very slightly different colored strip

of something behind a narrow opening in a thicket. It might have been withering fern, or a cluster of fading leaves, but he would never have imagined it to be a portion of a deer. Then his doubts vanished, for it suddenly moved.

"Where shall I shoot?" he asked beneath his breath.

"At the bottom of the bit you can see," was the low answer.

Frank threw up his rifle. He was too eager to kneel or lie down, and it scarcely seemed probable that the deer would wait until he was comfortably ready. He lined the sights on a twig immediately in front of the object, and though his hands had quivered he found them growing steadier as he squeezed the trigger. He heard no report, but there was a crash in the thicket as the smoke came drifting back, and Harry ran forward with a shout.

"Come on!" he cried. "You've hit it!"

Frank ran his fastest, though running of any kind was extraordinarily difficult. In places the withered fern was higher than his head and there seemed to be innumerable bushes in his way, while when he endeavored to avoid them he generally came upon a giant tree which had to be scrambled around. Still, there was no doubt that the deer was not far off, for he could hear it floundering through the brakes and fern, and by and by he came upon a trail of red splashes scattered here and there upon the leaves.

"It's hit bad," panted Harry. "If we can hold out we'll get it yet."

They did their utmost for the next half hour, but they never once saw the deer, which by the decreasing sound seemed to be drawing away from them, and Frank felt that it would be impossible for him to keep up the pace many minutes longer. He was breathless, and dripping with perspiration, and his clothes were torn all over. Indeed, eager as he was, it was almost

a relief when the sound in front of him gradually died away, and Harry stopped, gasping, and leaned against a fir.

"What are we going to do about it now?" Frank asked.

"Trail that deer," was the breathless answer. "It's not going very far. You can tell by the noise it made that it was hit too bad to jump."

Frank was of the opinion that it had gone quite far enough already, but he silently watched Harry, who began to walk up and down, looking carefully about him.

"It went through this bush," he said at length. "After that it must have crossed the fern yonder." Then scrambling forward he waved his hand. "Come on! The trail's quite plain."

Frank followed him with some trouble and once more saw the red splashes on the leaves. Now and then they lost them for a little while and the undergrowth did not seem to have been disturbed, but on each occasion Harry contrived to find the spots again. He traced them from place to place, moving more slowly and cautiously, while Frank painfully broke through the thickets in his wake. They were both nearly exhausted when an hour after the shot was fired they came to a little creek.

"It lay down here," said Harry. "We'll stop a minute or two. Guess that deer's 'most as played out as we are."

This seemed very probable to Frank as he glanced at the broad red smear upon the damp soil, and for the first time he was troubled by a sense of compunction as he realized that there were two sides to hunting. The pursuers' labor was severe enough, but he could imagine what the flight must have cost the sorely wounded creature who had so far managed to keep in front of them. He was scratched and torn and exhausted, but at least he was sound in limb, while the

deer must have staggered on in anguished terror with its life steadily draining from the cruel bullet hole. Somewhere in his mind there was now a wish that he had not made so good a shot.

"Do you think we're far behind it?" he asked.

"I don't, but that doesn't count," answered Harry. "We have to follow it, anyway. I remember when I got my first deer. Dad was with me, and before I fired he asked if I thought I could hit it where I wanted. I said I did, and he told me to make sure, because if the beast got away with a bullet in it I'd have to trail it until it dropped." He stopped with a significant laugh. "As it happened, we followed it close on three hours, through the thickest kind of bush, and—I wasn't so big then—it was mighty hard work to get back to the ranch afterward."

Frank fancied that in the present case he might drop before the deer did, though he realized that Mr. Oliver's rule was in one way a merciful one and undoubtedly calculated to encourage careful shooting. When he had recovered his breath a little they started again, but it was half an hour later when they caught a glimpse of the deer painfully laboring through a clump of fern on the slope of a steep rise. Harry pitched up his rifle, and though the animal disappeared again immediately after they fired, they knew it was still going on by the snapping of twigs and the rustling in the fern.

Harry was sure that he had hit it, and making a last effort, they broke into a run which Frank remembered for a considerable time afterward. The slope seemed to be getting remarkably steep, he could scarcely see a dozen yards in front of him through the undergrowth, and several times he stuck fast for a moment or two in tangled thickets. Then he fell into a horrible tangle of rotting branches, dropping his rifle and bruising himself cruelly, and he only succeeded in forcing himself along because his companion shouted breathlessly that

the deer was rapidly flagging. Frank could hear it very plainly now.

At last when they reached the summit of the rise it came out into open view for a moment. The bush was thinner there, with less growth between the trees, and he saw the animal limp out from a thicket, dragging an injured limb. He flung up his rifle, and Harry who was a little in front fired almost as he did. The deer staggered, made a feeble bound, and vanished as if the earth had opened under it. A moment or two later Harry stopped with a hoarse, gasping shout.

Frank stumbled forward and found him standing on the brink of what seemed to be a very deep ravine, the almost precipitous sides of which were shrouded in young firs and densely growing bushes. Harry was gazing dubiously into the gully.

"I don't quite know how we're going to get down, but we'll have to try," he said. "The deer's at the bottom done for, and I don't feel like going home and telling dad we left it. Besides, it's quite likely he might send us back for it."

"Then if it has to be done, we may as well get about it," said Frank wearily.

Slinging his rifle, he crawled over the edge and went sliding and slipping down for about a dozen yards until he fell into the branches of a young fir. After that he plunged into several bushes before he could stop again, and eventually lowered himself foot by foot, clutching at whatever seemed strong enough to hold him, until he alighted knee-deep in a splashing creek. Nearby the deer lay motionless where it had fallen upon the stones. It was a beautifully symmetrical creature, but it seemed to Frank smaller than he had expected.

"A young black-tail," said Harry. "Anyway, that's what we call them, though I believe it's really the mule-deer. There's another black-tail. We've got the deer names kind of mixed up on the Pacific Slope."

Frank regarded the animal dubiously. "It seems to me the most important question is how we're going to get it home."

"Pack it," answered Harry. "But I'd better open it up first. You can sit down while I do it, if you'd rather."

Frank would very much have preferred to sit down out of sight while the deer was dressed, but it occurred to him that it would scarcely be fitting to leave the disagreeable part of the work to his companion.

"No," he persisted, "I'll help as much as I can."

"Well," said Harry dryly, "if you want to go hunting it's a thing you'll have to learn."

The operations that followed were singularly unpleasant, and Frank felt a good deal less enthusiastic about hunting when he washed his hands and the sleeves of his jacket in the creek after they were over.

"I don't know if I'll eat any of that deer," he said.

"You'll get over it," Harry assured him with a smile. "Anyway, in my opinion deer meat isn't much of a delicacy. It's that stringy you could 'most make lariats of it, unless you keep it until it's bad."

Frank felt inclined later to agree with this statement, but in the meanwhile Harry got the deer, which he had not yet skinned, upon his shoulders with its fore legs pulled over in front of him, and they started back for the ranch. It was, however, some time before they could find a way out of the gulch, and then they only gained the summit by an arduous scramble. After that they found themselves in exceedingly thick bush, with nothing that Frank could see to guide them. There was probably not much light at any time down among those great trunks whose branches met and crossed high overhead, and what there was seemed to be getting dim.

"If we keep on going down we'll strike something by and by," urged Harry. "The slope's naturally toward the beach."

The first thing they struck was a remarkably steep hillside, up which they struggled, Frank now carrying the deer, which he found heavy enough before he reached the top. Then a narrow valley opened up before them, which did not seem to be what Harry had expected. There were one or two ponds in the bottom of it, and he gazed at them thoughtfully.

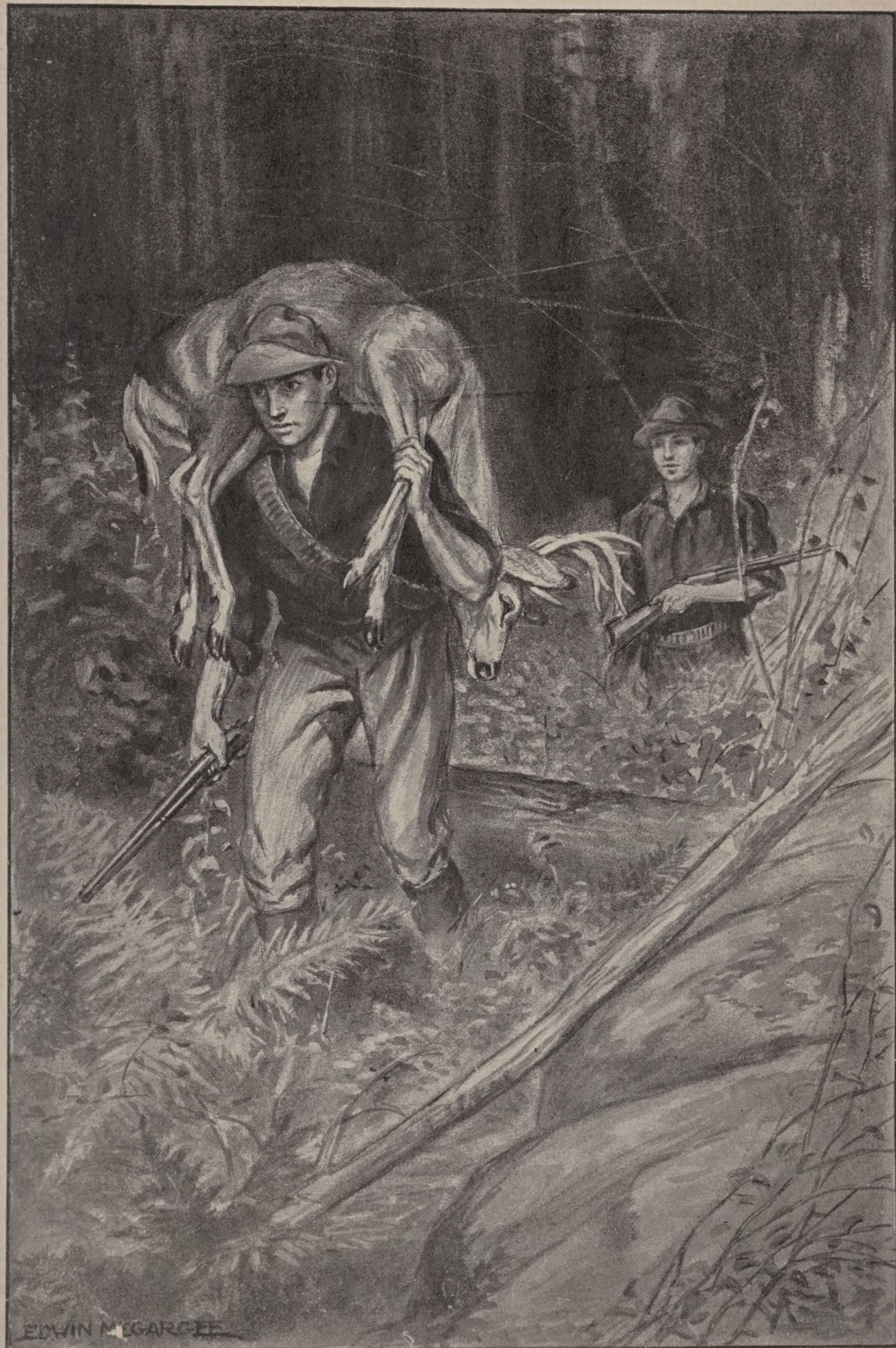
"We might get a duck," he mused. "They ought to be coming down from Alaska now. It's freezing up there."

They floundered down the declivity, and, though Frank would have preferred to push on straight for home, Harry insisted on creeping through the long harsh grass about the edge of the water. They tried one of the ponds with no result, but at last Harry dropped suddenly behind a tall clump of grass.

"Look!" he said. "There are two or three ducks yonder. You take the nearest. Keep the foresight as fine as you can."

Frank saw one or two small objects floating just outside the grass across the pond. They seemed to be a very long way off, and though he feared that he could not keep the sights upon any of them standing, the ground looked horribly quaggy to kneel in. This could not be helped, however, for it seemed that getting wet and torn did not count when one was hunting, and he pressed his right knee down into the mire. He could just see one of the ducks when he closed his left eye, and he had misgivings as to the result when he squeezed the trigger. Harry's rifle flashed immediately after his, there was a rattle of wings and a startled quacking, and he saw two ducks with long necks stretched out fly off above the trees. Another seemed to be lying on the water, and remembering the size of the bullet, he had no fear of that one getting away.

"The next thing is to get it," said Harry. "It's not going to be easy."



“FRANK COULD SEE NOTHING TO GUIDE THEM”—Page 171

He was perfectly right. They spent a long while struggling around the pond, into which they had to wade nearly waist-deep before Harry contrived to rake the duck in toward him with the muzzle of his rifle. It did not look a sightly object when he had secured it, but he decided that there was enough of it left to eat.

"Is it the one you shot at?" he asked with a grin.

"I can't say," Frank answered. "I shouldn't be surprised if it wasn't."

"Well," said Harry, "we're not going to quarrel about the thing. What we have to do is to make a bee-line home. We'll come along again in a week or two. The ponds are full of ducks for a little in the spring and fall."

"Only then?"

"They're not so plentiful between-whiles," Harry answered. "Of course, our worst winters aren't marked by the cold snaps you have back East, and quite a few of the ducks stay with us, while some put in the summer, too; but in a general way every swimming bird of any size heads north to the tundra marshes by the Polar Sea in spring. In the fall they come back again, how far I don't know — lower California, Mexico, perhaps, right away to Bolivia and Peru. Going and coming, the big flocks stop around here to rest a while." He smiled at his companion. "A mallard duck's a little thing, but he covers a considerable sweep of country."

He picked up the deer and they went on again, but darkness overtook them before they reached the ranch, utterly worn out, with most of their garments rent to tatters; and Frank, who had carried the deer the last mile or two, gave a gasp of relief when he laid it down.

CHAPTER XVII

MR. WEBSTER'S GUNS

IT was about a week after the boys' hunting trip when Mr. Oliver's nearest neighbor, Mr. Webster, drove up to the ranch in a dilapidated wagon. It was dark when he arrived, for the days were rapidly getting shorter. When Jake had taken his horse away he laid what appeared to be a small armory on the kitchen table and sat down by the stove. He was a young man with a careless, good-humored expression, and Harry aside informed Frank that his ranch was not much of a place.

"I've brought you my guns along," said Mr. Webster, addressing Mr. Oliver, and then looked down at the dog, who had walked up to him in the meanwhile and now stood regarding him with its head on one side. "Hello!" he added, patting it, "I'd 'most forgotten you. You have managed to put up with him, Miss Oliver?"

Miss Oliver said that she had grown fond of him, and the dog, after standing up with a paw upon the man's knee, dropped down on all fours at the sound of her voice and trotted back to her without waiting for another pat.

"I always had a notion he was an ungrateful as well as an ordinary beast," said Mr. Webster. "Would you have fancied my dog would leave me like that after all I've done for him? I guess I've laid into him with 'most everything about the ranch from the grubhoe handle to the riding quirt."

Mr. Oliver laughed. "But why have you brought your guns?"

"For you to take care of. My place gets damp in winter without the stove on and I'm going away for a month or two. I've taken on a log-bridge contract with a fellow I used to work with, on one of the new settlement roads. The man who's been clearing land up the creek took the few head of stock I had off my hands and the fruit trees will grow along all right without worrying anybody until I get back again. If one hadn't to do so much cutting every now and then, they'd be a long sight handier than raising stock."

"Well," Mr. Oliver assured, "I think we can promise to look after the guns. I didn't know you had so many of them."

Mr. Webster arose and walked toward the table. "Though I never was a great shot, guns are rather a hobby of mine. I needn't say anything about these two — single-shot Marlin, Winchester repeater — but the old-timers seem to have a notion that a man must excuse himself for keeping a scatter gun. This" — and he picked up what seemed to Frank a handsome single barrel — "is a thing I bought for a few dollars last time I was in Portland. I allowed she would do to keep the pigeons off my oats. Not much of a gun, but she throws out the shell." Then he took up a double gun with the brown rubbed off the barrels, leaving bright patches. "This one's different; there's some tone about her. A sport I once had boarding with me gave her to me when he went away. Said I'd given him a great time, and as he was fixed, it might be two or three years before he could get out into the woods again."

He sat down on the table and looked over with a smile at the boys. "I don't know any reason why you two shouldn't have those guns until I come back; they'll keep better if they're used and rubbed out once in a while, and there's a box of shells in the wagon. You can't call yourself a sport until you can drop a flying bird with the scatter gun, and there's considerably more

to it than most of the old-timers who can only plug a deer with a rifle seem to think."

He evidently noticed the interest in Frank's face, for he proceeded to demonstrate, standing up with the double gun held across him a little above his waist.

"Now," he added, "you don't want to aim, poking the gun about. You keep it down and your eyes on the bird, until you're ready, and then pitch it up right on the spot first time—it's better with both eyes open, if you can manage it." The gun went in to his shoulder and Frank heard the striker click, after which the man swung the muzzle half a foot or so. "Say you missed. You've still got the second barrel—"

They heard no more, for there was an appalling crash, a short cry from Miss Oliver, and a yelp from the dog who jumped into the air, while a filmy cloud of smoke drifted about the room. When it cleared Mr. Webster, who had opened the door, sat down on the table looking very sheepish and turned toward Miss Oliver.

"I'm sorry—dreadful sorry," he observed contritely. "I hadn't the least notion there was anything in the thing."

Mr. Oliver glanced at the ragged hole high up in the log wall and then looked at Mr. Webster with ironical amusement in his eyes.

"Your instructions were good as far as they went, but you have forgotten one rather important point." He turned to the boys. "It's this. Never bring a gun of any kind into a house without first opening the magazine or breach, and if there's a shell in it, immediately take it out. It's a precaution that's as simple as it's effective, and though there was perhaps some excuse for an accident in the old days when a man couldn't readily empty his gun unless he fired off the charge, there's none now."

"Sure," agreed Mr. Webster, who seemed to be get-

ting over his confusion, for he addressed the boys again. "With winter coming on, the best sport I know with a scatter gun is shooting fighting duck, and there's plenty of them along the beach. They've a way of moving around in flocks between the light and dark, which is the best time, though you can get them through the night if there's not too bright a moon. A good place would be those patches of sand and mud behind the islands, especially when the tide's just leaving the flats. Take the sloop or canoe along sometime and try it."

The boys thanked him and Frank's eyes glistened as he handled the light single gun.

"What are you going to do with your team?" asked Mr. Oliver, changing the subject.

"Anson down by Nare's Hill will take them for their keep, but I might have made a few dollars out of them if I'd been staying on."

"How's that?"

"Well," in a significant tone, "a man came along three or four nights ago. I don't know where he came from, and I don't know where he went—he just walked in with the lamp lit when I was getting supper. He wanted to know if I was open to hire him a team for a night or two."

"What kind of a man?"

"A stranger. He looked like a sailor and seemed liberal. Said he wanted the team particularly, and if I'd have them handy when he turned up we needn't quarrel about the figure. That must have meant I could charge most what I liked."

"What did you say?"

Mr. Webster smiled. "I just told him the horses were promised and I couldn't make the deal. Anyway"—and he added this in a different voice—"I'd no notion of going back on you."

"Thanks," said Mr. Oliver quietly, and they talked

about other matters until Webster, making a few more excuses to Miss Oliver, drove away. When he had gone she looked at her brother and laughed softly.

"I was startled but not very much astonished when the gun went off," she said. "The little incident was so characteristic of the man."

The next day the boys commenced practicing at flung-up meat cans with the cartridges he had given them and in a week they could hit one every now and then at thirty yards. Soon afterward Mr. Oliver went away. He only told the boys that he was going to Tacoma, but Harry thought it possible that he wanted to see Mr. Barclay, since Mr. Webster's story made it clear that the dope runners were about again. He announced ingenuously that they had better try the flight-shooting while his father was away, because if they came back all right with several ducks he would probably not object to their going another time. Miss Oliver seemed doubtful when they casually mentioned the project to her, but as she did not actually forbid it they set out with the sloop late one afternoon, taking the dog with them.

It was falling dusk and the tide had been running ebb two or three hours when they beat in under the lee side of one of the islands they had passed on a previous occasion on their way to the settlement. After anchoring the sloop where she would lie afloat at low water some distance off the beach they got into the canoe and paddling ashore crossed the island, which was small and narrow. It was covered with thin underbrush and dwarf firs, and on its opposite side a broad stretch of wet sand and shingle with pools and creeks in it stretched back toward the channel, which cut it off from the mainland.

To the eastward, the pale silver sickle of a crescent moon hung low in the sky, but westward a wide band of flaring crimson and saffron still burned beneath dusky masses of ragged cloud and the uncovered sands

gleamed blood-red in the fading glow. A cold wind stirred the pines to an eerie sighing, and the splash of a tiny surf came up faintly from the outer edge of the sands. The whole scene struck Frank as very forbidding and desolate, and he fancied that there was a threat of wind in the sky. Something in the loneliness troubled him, and for no particular reason he felt half sorry that he had come. He realized that it would have been much more cozy in the sloop's cabin than upon that dreary beach, and he said something about the weather to Harry.

"We'll be sheltered here if the breeze does come up, and this looks just the place where we ought to get a duck," his companion answered. "There aren't many spots like it around this part of the coast, where we've generally deeper water. Perhaps we'd better move on a little nearer yonder clump of firs. They'll hide us from any birds that come sailing down to the flats."

"What's the matter with the dog?" Frank asked. "What's he snuffing at?"

The animal was trotting about with his nose upon the ground and would not come when they called him.

"I don't know," said Harry carelessly. "Perhaps somebody's been across the island lately, though I don't think it's often a white man lands here."

They took up their stations a little apart from each other among some very rough boulders, with the nearest of the firs on a rocky ridge some thirty or forty yards away from them. Their ragged branches cut in a sharp ebony pattern against the sky, which was duskily blue. It was very cold and the wind seemed fresher, for the trees were rustling and moaning, and the calling of distant wildfowl came up through the increasing murmur of the surf.

Frank's boots had suffered from hard wear in the bush, and, as he had stumbled into a pool, his feet were very wet, but he crouched behind a boulder, clutching

the single-barreled gun with cold fingers, and watching the sky beyond the fir tops, for what seemed a considerable time. Nothing moved across it except a long wisp of torn-edged cloud, and he was commencing to wonder whether it would not be better to go back to the sloop when Harry called softly, and he heard a new sound in the darkness somewhere beyond the firs. It suggested the regular movement of a row of fans, which was the best comparison that occurred to him, for there was a kind of measured beat in it, and in another few moments he recognized it as the rhythmic stroke of wings. Then a double line of dark bodies spreading out from a point in the shape of a wedge appeared close above him against the sky.

He saw that they had long necks, but that was all, for they were coming on with an extraordinary swiftness. There was a crash as Harry's gun flung a streak of red fire into the darkness. Then Frank pitched up the single barrel, pulling hard upon the trigger as the butt struck his shoulder. He felt the jar of it and saw a whirling blaze, after which he swung around when Harry's gun flashed again.

The wedge, which had scattered, was reuniting. He could just see it dotted upon the sky, but he fancied that one dark object had come whirling down and struck the flats outshore of him a few seconds earlier.

"One, sure!" cried Harry. "I've an idea there's a cripple, too, trailing on the ground. Where's that dog? I wonder if he'd hunt it up?"

They called, but there was no sign of the animal.

"He'd probably sit down and eat it, if he got it," said Frank, laughing. "As he isn't here, we'd better get after the birds."

They soon picked up the dead one, a mallard, Harry said; but it was some minutes before they saw the other fluttering across a patch of wet sand. Breaking into a run they were astonished to find that they did not get

much nearer, and it must be admitted that Frank fired again without stopping it. After that, it led them through several pools and runlets of water, until at a flash of Harry's gun it lay still, but they were almost up to their knees in a little channel before they retrieved it.

"I wonder how long we'll have to wait before some more ducks come," said Harry as they made their way back to the boulders. Then he suddenly looked about him. "Where can that dog have gone?"

They called a second time, but there was still no answer, and while they listened it struck Frank that the sound of the surf was growing more distinct.

"He seemed to be trailing something when I last saw him," he answered. "I don't feel keen on going after him. The top of the island's rough. Perhaps, we'd better wait here until he comes."

They waited for about ten minutes and then a succession of quick barks reached them, apparently from across the island. There was something startling in the sound and Frank turned sharply toward his companion.

"He doesn't bark like that for nothing. Hadn't we better go along?" he suggested.

They started on the moment, stumbling among the boulders and splashing into pools. The going was no easier when they reached the firs, but they broke through them somehow, and when at length they approached the beach, which was steep on that side, the dog came bounding toward them and then ran back with a growl to the edge of the water. Looking around with strained attention, Frank made out the sloop, a dim, dark shape upon the water, for the moon was covered now. After that he ran down toward the edge of the tide, but there was nothing unusual to be seen, though the dog again yelped savagely. As he stopped close beside the animal Harry's voice reached him.

"Where's the canoe?" he cried.

It was a moment or two before Frank saw her, and then he started and cast a quick glance at the strip of beach left uncovered by the ebbing tide. The breeze was off the shore, and on arriving they had thrown over a lump of iron with a rope mast fast to it and then paddled the canoe ashore and shoved her out again to drift off as far as the rope would allow her, in order to avoid dragging her down over the rough stones when they went away. Now she seemed farther off than she should have been, and in another moment he realized that she was moving.

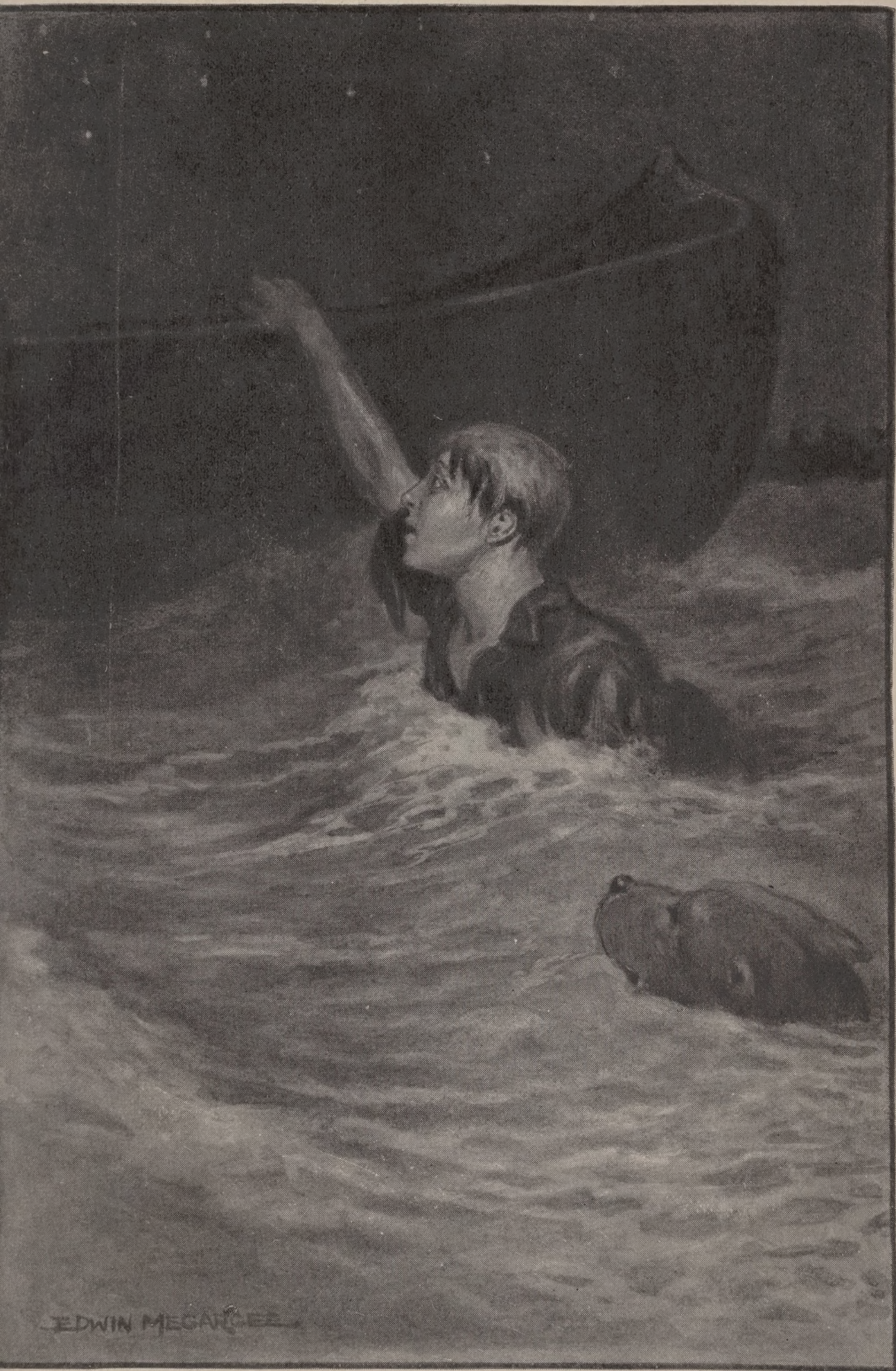
"She's adrift!" he shouted.

"Then we will have to get her," Harry answered.

Frank laid down his gun and threw off his jacket. Harry could swim better than he could, but Harry was some distance back and the beach was very rough, while it was clear that every moment would increase the distance between it and the canoe. He struck his knees against something which hurt as he floundered into the water, stumbling among the stones, but that did not matter then, and as soon as it was deep enough he flung himself down. A horrible chill struck through him as he swung his left arm out, and he was badly hampered by his boots and clothes, and though he swam savagely the canoe was still some way in front of him when at length he turned breathlessly upon his breast. What was worse, she was steadily drifting farther off shore.

Chilled and anxious as he was, he thought quickly. He was far from certain that he could get back to the beach, and even if he did so, he would have to spend the night wet through without any means of making a shelter. The sloop was lying a good way out and he did not think that Harry could swim so far in that cold water. He was quite sure that he could not, and it was evident that there was nothing for it but to overtake the canoe.

For what seemed a very long time he swam desper-



ately, and then just as he was almost alongside the craft something came up behind him and seized his arm. Turning his head with a half-choked cry, he saw that it was the dog, who apparently intended to stick fast to him. The animal, however, hampered him terribly, and flinging it off he made a last effort and contrived to clutch the canoe before it seized him again. Holding on by the low stern he tried to recover his breath, while he wondered if he could manage to lift himself in. It seemed to him that if he failed to do it at that moment he could not expect to succeed afterward, in which case he would in all probability have to let go before very long. Setting his lips he made the attempt, and falling headforemost into the canoe he lay still for a few moments gasping, until he rose and pulled the dog on board. Then he hauled up the iron, which was still attached to the rope, though it was not upon the bottom, and found a paddle. Two or three minutes later he was back at the beach, and Harry got in.

"Make for the sloop as fast as you can," he said.

Frank, now chilled to the bone, was glad to paddle, and they were soon alongside. Harry handed him up the birds and guns when he got on board, and then made the painter fast.

"I'll start the stove first thing while you tie two reefs in the mainsail," he said. "I guess we'll want them, and the work will warm you."

He disappeared below, and before he came out again Frank had managed to get the tack and leach down, which was not so difficult now that the sail lay along the boom.

Harry gave him a quick look.

"Go in and strip yourself," he said. "There's a blanket forward and some coffee in the can. I'll be down by the time you have wrung out your things."

CHAPTER XVIII

RUNNING A CARGO

ON crawling into the cabin Frank found the stove burning fiercely with the register open full blast. He was sitting near it wrapped in a thick blanket from which his bare legs and arms protruded when Harry joined him.

"This should thaw you out," the latter said. "The place would do for drying fruit in. Got any coffee left?"

Frank gave him some, and when he had drunk it Harry examined some of the garments which were hanging about the stove.

"They'll be getting fairly dry in half an hour or so and then we'll pull out for home," he added. "It's breezing up quite smart now and I'd lie here until morning only aunt would get badly scared. She wouldn't say anything, but if Jake got to talking it would probably make trouble when dad comes home."

"How did the canoe get adrift?" Frank inquired sleepily.

"That," said Harry with an excellent imitation of Mr. Barclay's manner, "is a point I have been investigating. To begin with, the killick had been hauled up since we pitched it over, and let go again—only on the last occasion it was made fast so it wouldn't quite fetch the bottom." He raised his hand in protest as Frank was about to speak. "It's a sure thing. One strand was chafed where I took a turn with the rope, and that frayed bit had got moved a fathom or two along. I felt about until I struck it."

Frank started, for this confirmed a hazy suspicion which had already been in his mind, but he stooped to pat the dog, who was licking his uncovered foot.

"Hold on. Your tongue's rough," he said before he looked up at his companion. "What do you make of the thing?"

"Well," said Harry, "the man who did it wanted it to look as if the canoe had gone adrift by accident. He was on the island when we came along and the dog got after him. It's most likely he went off in a boat or canoe while we were making for the beach after we'd heard the barking. Seems to me he'd some reason for wanting to keep us here."

"You think he was one of the dope men?" suggested Frank.

"I wouldn't be greatly astonished if we saw the schooner on our way home," Harry answered with a chuckle.

There was some excuse for his amusement, because Frank looked somewhat ludicrous as he sat thinking hard with his brows wrinkled down and the blanket falling away from him.

"I've an idea," he announced at length. "The question, of course, is why should the man who set the canoe adrift have landed on a desolate place like this? I expect it's just its desolateness that brought him here. Now the smugglers probably find it difficult to get hold of the dope in Canada, and they may have to save it up in small parcels until it's worth while to send the schooner through. She couldn't come often with only a case or two, because it wouldn't pay and it would increase the chances of somebody's seeing her. On the other hand, they may not be able to get rid of the stuff immediately when she brings a big lot, and in that case they'd be likely to make a cache of part of it where nobody would be likely to strike it and their friends

could come for it later. This island ought to be just the place."

Harry made a sign of assent.

"I guess you've hit it first time, but I'll go up and get the mainsail on her. I can manage it alone with two reefs in, and you can stay where you are until your clothes are a little drier, unless I call you."

He went out, and Frank heard a clatter of blocks and flutter of canvas. After that there was a sharp rattling as Harry hauled in the anchor chain, and then the boat suddenly slanted over with a jerk which flung Frank backward against the side of her. As he got up he heard the water splash about her bows. A few minutes later they began to swing sharply up and down, and the thuds against them made it evident that the sloop was plunging close-hauled through a short, head sea. By and by the plunges grew more violent, and struggling into his clothes, which were partly dry, Frank put out the lamp and crawled out into the well. For a minute or two he could see nothing as he held on by the weather coaming, though he felt the buffeting of the wind and the sting of the spray upon his face. Then by degrees he made out that the sloop was lying down on one side, with the small black strip of her double-reefed mainsail slanting sharply above her, and a filmy white cloud flying at her bows. Suddenly the frothing water began to glitter, and on looking up he saw that the moon, which had grown brighter, had just emerged from behind a bank of flying cloud. Then Harry who sat at the helm called to him.

"Look yonder! Just over the bowsprit end," he cried.

Frank, gazing where his companion told him, saw a bright red twinkle low down above the sea and apparently two or three miles away.

"A fire!" he exclaimed. "On the island by the point, isn't it?"

"A signal," Harry assented. "Guess it's to show the

schooner men the bush gang are ready." He broke into a laugh which reached Frank faintly. "They're figuring we're safe on the island out of the way. You couldn't see that fire from the beach we were left upon."

"What are you going to do?"

"Stand right on to where the fire is. We have to make a long leg on this tack, anyway. When we're close up with the point we'll consider. Get a little more head sheet in if you can."

It cost Frank an effort, though the sloop was carrying her smallest jib, and when he had made the rope fast he crouched beside his comrade in the partial shelter of the coaming with the dog at his feet. It was blowing moderately fresh, and the sloop was very wet, for the tide was running with her and she thrashed on at a great pace pitching the water all over, while the red twinkle ahead grew steadily higher and brighter. It was the only thing that Frank could see, because the moon had disappeared again.

In the meanwhile he wondered what his companion meant to do, for he fancied that Harry had something in his mind. The latter was like his father in some respects, since he did not, as a rule, explain what his intentions were until he was reasonably sure that he could carry them out. One result of this was that while each seldom did less than he said he would he not infrequently did a good deal more. Folks of this kind, Frank reflected, inspired one with confidence.

At last, when the fire was large and bright, a head loomed up above it with the wavering glow falling upon its rocky face. On one side of the crag there was a strip of darkness, which Frank supposed was water, and a little nearer him a long shadowy patch, which he knew to be an island. He turned to Harry, who was just then glancing up at the sky.

"We'll run right into the light if you stand on much longer," he pointed out.

He had hardly spoken when the red blaze sank down amidst an upward rush of sparks, and as it died away Harry laughed.

"That means one of two things," he said. "Either they've given the schooner up, or she has her anchor down inside and they've no more use for a light that might set folks wondering, though I don't know that anybody would be likely to see it."

"Anyway, you'll go ashore if you stand on," persisted Frank.

"It's not my intention that we should stand on," said Harry, glancing up again at the cloud-barred sky. "We can just weather the island as she's lying, and when that's done I could put up my helm and run through the sound behind it. I'll do it if the moon keeps in. If the schooner's inside yonder we ought to see her."

Frank was rather staggered by the boldness of the idea. The strait seemed narrow and he fancied that it would be further contracted by shallows now that the tide was getting low, while it appeared very probable that if they saw the schooner her crew would see them. If she were landing cargo there would be boats about, and he did not think it would be pleasant to fall in with them, after the pains somebody had taken in setting the canoe adrift. Still, though he was very dubious about its wisdom, the prospect of the adventure appealed to him and Harry seemed to take his consent for granted.

"We'll carry a fair wind through," the latter announced. "If it's necessary we could lower the peak down and that would leave very little canvas to be seen. You had better shorten the canoe up while I luff. She's half full and towing heavily."

The mainsail thrashed and the speed slackened when he put down his helm, and Frank, hauling with all his might, dragged the canoe up a little closer astern and made her fast with a shorter rope, after which Harry got way on the boat again. It seemed to Frank to be

blowing harder, and she swayed down farther, plunging furiously through the short seas with a white belt of surf which had shadowy rocks behind it to lee of her. The moon was still hidden, but it was evident that they were very close to the end of the island. By and by the white line to lee suddenly vanished and they stretched out into the dark water, with a high, black mass not far ahead.

"We've got to jibe her," said Harry. "Get the peak down."

The deck was horribly slanted and slippery, but Frank made his way forward along it while the seas which seemed steeper there drenched him with showers of cold brine. He found the halliard and let it go, and scrambling aft as the head of the sail swung down, helped his companion, who was struggling with a rope, while he jammed the tiller over with his shoulder.

"Handy!" cried Harry. "You must check the boom as it comes over."

The craft was coming round with her stern to the wind, and as she did so the canoe came up on the top of a sea and struck her with a crash. Frank had, however, no thought to spare for her. He was dragging at the mainsheet as the big boom tilted up into the darkness above his head, while the sloop rolled heavily. Then the upper part of the bagging sail swung over with a bang and he whipped the rope around something as the heavy spar followed it. The sloop rolled at the same time until half her deck was in the sea, the sheet was torn furiously through his hands, and the canoe hit her with another heavy thud as she swayed up again. Then it drove astern, and Frank had space to gather his breath and look about him as they swept on into smoother water.

Harry was edging in toward the low black ridge of the island, and there was a higher mass on the opposite side crested with what appeared to be rows of pines, with a

dark gap between them. They could now hear the surf on the weather side of the island, which told them that they were already behind it. Four or five minutes later the channel twisted, and as they swept around a black rock two or three lights blinked out ahead, with a low red blaze behind them, apparently on the opposite beach.

"There she is; ready to clear at the shortest notice," said Harry, stretching out a pointing hand. "They've kept the boom-foresail and most of the mainsail on her, though I guess the anchor's down. We'll get the center-board up."

They were drawing nearer the lights rapidly, but it was two or three minutes before Frank, who heaved the board up into its case, could make out a black mass of fluttering canvas against the sky. Then Harry spoke again:

"There's a shingle bank runs out not far ahead and there can't be much water over it now the tide's nearly run out. I'm afraid I'll have to pass on the other hand of the schooner."

Frank could understand why he did not want to do this, since the channel was narrow and they must pass between the lights of the vessel and the fire upon the beach. It seemed to him that it would be singularly awkward if they met a boat coming from or going to the latter, which, however, was precisely what befell them.

Harry ran the sloop off as far as he dared, and Frank was watching the schooner's black hull rise higher when he made out a dim shape that moved between her and the beach.

"A boat, sure!" cried Harry. "Get the mainsheet in. We'll have to take our chances of the shoal."

He helped Frank with one hand, but the task was almost beyond their strength, and while they dragged at the rope the half-seen boat and the schooner seemed

to be flying toward them. Then as they made the rope fast and the sloop headed in toward the island a pale gleam from a light on the vessel fell upon her. It seemed impossible to Frank that they should not be seen, but nobody hailed them, and while he listened, expecting every moment to hear a shout, a clatter of blocks broke through the splash of approaching oars. Even behind the island, the water was rather broken and the men seemed to be pulling hard.

A moment later the light faded off the sloop, though Frank could see the schooner comparatively plainly. Her tall, shadowy canvas was fluttering athwart the light, and beneath it a cluster of indistinct figures rose and fell as they heaved up something with a tackle. He could hear their voices clearly, and he was glad to remember that the dusky ridge of the island rose behind the sloop, though he wished his companion would run closer in with it. He had seen all he wanted and only desired to get away as soon as possible.

It became evident by and by that Harry had run in closer than was advisable, for there was a crash and the sloop suddenly stopped. Almost immediately afterward she lay over with her boom and most of her deck on one side in the water, while the tide, twisting her bows around, threatened to pour into her over the depressed coaming. As she had come up nearly head to wind, her mainsail thrashed furiously, jerking the boom up out of the sea every now and then and letting it splash in again, while the flapping jib seemed likely to snap off the head of her rattling mast. Loose ropes appeared to be flying everywhere and Frank clung stupidly to the coaming, uncertain what to do. They were aground unfortunately close to the schooner, and, he feared, within sight of the men on board her. Harry's voice, however, roused him to make an effort.

"Jump forward with the big oar! We must get her off," he said. "The tide's still falling."

Frank trod upon and fell over the dog, who fortunately was unable to see anything over the coaming. He scarcely heard it yelping as he scrambled along the steeply slanted deck dragging the heavy oar. They got it over and thrust upon it in desperate haste in an attempt to cant her bow off, but as the tide swung her farther around her side came up against the oar, threatening to break it or pitch the boys over the rail, and for a while they strained every muscle in vain. Then she suddenly swung back in the midst of a furious swirl, and Frank fell down on something that seemed unpleasantly hard. Harry, flinging the oar upon the deck, dropped close by, feeling for a rope.

"Get up and get hold!" he cried breathlessly. "We must box her round with the jib. You can lie down afterward."

Frank scrambled up and pulled in a frenzy, and the boat swung farther around. Then the mainsail ceased fluttering, and jumping aft they fell into the well, where Frank fancied that he trod upon the dog again. Harry immediately seized the tiller, thrusting it to weather, and the sloop commenced to move slowly through the water, though there was a harsh grinding beneath her. By and by she suddenly shot forward again.

"She's off!" exclaimed Harry. "Give her sheet!"

Frank let the mainsheet run and afterward leaned breathlessly upon the coaming with a thrill of relief as they drove out into the deeper water; but it appeared that his companion was not satisfied yet.

"She should run over to the opposite side without bringing the boom across," he said. "There seems to be a big rock yonder and we could heave her to in the gloom of it. If I remember, it's good water."

"What for?" asked Frank, who was anxious to get out of the channel.

"Well," said Harry, "we've seen the schooner, a boat, and a fire upon the beach, but, after all, that's not

a great deal to go upon. We want to make sure what she's putting ashore."

The boom lifted ominously as he ran her off and Frank fancied that somebody would certainly hear the crash if he jibed it over. She stretched across, however, and, rounding her up close beneath a dark rock, they hauled the jib to windward and waited. Though they were in deep shadow, a stream of flickering radiance fell upon the water not far away and lighted up a narrow strip of beach. A few minutes passed and then Harry touched his companion, who saw several men cross the shingle with loads upon their shoulders. Their figures showed black against the light, and Frank fancied that they were carrying square wooden cases. After them came several more figures, but these carried nothing and were dressed differently. They looked like Chinamen and they had evidently just got out of an unseen boat.

"Now," said Harry, "I guess that will do. If you'll trim the jib over I'll get way on her."

Frank was glad to do it. He felt that he had seen quite enough and it would be wiser to get away before any misadventure befell them. They ran out of the channel and were thrashing close-hauled into a rather steep head sea when Harry spoke again.

"There were four cases in the last lot, and another boat went ashore," he observed. "It looks as if they would swamp the market. Dope's dear, and a little of it goes a mighty long way."

"Perhaps there was something else in some of the cases," suggested Frank.

"It's possible, though from the little I know of the tariff I haven't an idea of what it could be. Anyway, that's a proposition we can leave to Barclay. They were certainly Chinamen and passengers who landed."

"How do you know they were passengers?" Frank inquired.

Harry laughed. "If they'd been anything else they'd

have had to carry those boxes. As a general thing, an American doesn't work while a Chinaman watches him."

Nothing more was said, and half an hour later when pale moonlight once more streamed down upon the water the schooner swept out of the gloom astern of them. After that they went about and clung to the shadow along the land until they lost sight of her shortly before they ran into the cove.

It was very late when they reached the ranch, but they merely informed Miss Oliver that they had had some trouble through the canoe going adrift and had been compelled to beat back against a strong head wind.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CACHE

MR. OLIVER came home soon after the boys' visit to the island, and when he had heard Harry's narration of their adventures he made him tell it over again in the presence of Mr. Barclay, whom he had brought back with him. They were sitting in the log-walled kitchen in the evening with their chairs drawn up about the stove, and Mr. Barclay, holding his pipe in his hand, listened gravely.

"Well," he said, when Harry had finished, "you seem to be considerably more fortunate in these matters than I am. You have seen the schooner several times, and other interesting things, while I haven't even had a glimpse of the man with the high shoulder yet. I suppose I'll have to admit at last that I've been upon his trail for some time and have made some progress."

"You might as well have admitted it in the beginning," retorted Harry. "Some folks progress slow."

Mr. Barclay's eyes twinkled. "As a rule, it's difficult to hustle the Government of the United States, and I'm inclined to think the same thing applies to that of other countries. However, as I said, we have got ahead a little at the other end. For example, we have a tolerably accurate notion where the dope goes."

"Then why don't you corral everybody who has anything to do with it?"

Mr. Barclay's gesture seemed to beg the boy's forbearance.

"It's a sensible question. For one thing, strictly speaking, it's not my particular business, which is really

to sit in an office and dictate instructions most of the time. To some extent, these jaunts I've had with your father have been undertaken by way of innocent relaxation, although they may prove useful in case certain gentlemen send me along a list of peremptory questions on which they want reports. They do things of that kind now and then."

"I didn't think it was your business to take a smuggler by the neck and haul him along to the sheriff," said Harry with a reproachful air. "Still, you could call out your subordinates and send them off to round up the dope crowd, couldn't you? There must be some official machinery for doing that kind of thing."

"There is," assented Mr. Barclay, refilling his pipe. "The trouble is that it makes a certain amount of commotion, and when silence is important you have to be careful how you set it to work. As a rule, it's wiser to have everything ready first. The most careful plans fail sometimes if your assistants are more keen than judicious. That"—and he smiled at the boys—"is why I was dubious about taking you into my confidence before."

"Thank you, sir," said Harry with ironical courtesy. "Do you mind making what you mean to do a little plainer?"

"I'll try. In the first place, smuggling doesn't seem to be considered a crime unless you're caught at it. In fact, a Government of any kind is generally looked upon as fair game, and few people think much the worse of a man who succeeds in doing it out of part of its revenue. How far that idea's right or wrong doesn't concern me. What I must do is to prevent it from being acted on too often, and, taking the notion for granted; we don't want to put the laugh upon ourselves if it can be avoided."

Harry made a sign of comprehension. "Still, if you sent your people down here they should be able to corral part of the gang."

"I agree with you," Barclay answered dryly. "It's possible, anyway — but what would the result be? Three or four persons of no importance might be seized, the rest would get away with a warning, and our plans would all be sprung." Then the stout, good-humored man seemed to change, for his expression suddenly hardened and a look which the boys had never noticed there before crept into his eyes. "No, sir. We want them all, and when we move we expect to gather in the whole rascally combination."

"How can we butt in?"

"With your father's permission, you might, in the first place, invite me to an evening's flight shooting."

"Wouldn't it be better to go across the island in the daytime with the dog and Jake and a couple of spades?"

"No," replied Mr. Barclay. "If my opinion's of any value, I don't think it would be wise. Besides, I understand that the best time for getting a shot at flying ducks is in the twilight."

Miss Oliver laughed softly. "Enterprise is a good thing, and so is self-confidence," she broke in. "On the other hand, I fancy that one can have too much of them, and a headstrong impatience is one of the faults of the young West."

Mr. Oliver looked at Harry, who grew a trifle red.

"There's truth in that," he remarked. "On the whole it might be better to leave all arrangements to the man in charge and just do what he suggests."

"Sure," assented Harry, and as he offered no more suggestions the matter was decided with a few more words.

Late in the next afternoon the boys set out with Mr. Barclay in the sloop, and as what wind there was blew off the land they crept along close in with the beach, which was high and rocky and shrouded with thick timber. When they drew abreast of the island the tide was higher than it had been on the last occasion, but

Mr. Barclay said that they had better leave the sloop in the little bay in front of them and cross the channel in the canoe. He was a heavy man, and when he cautiously dropped into the craft her stern sank ominously near the water.

"You'll have to get farther forward and sit quite still," said Harry in a tone of authority, but with an amused look.

He took his place astern with Frank, who picked up the other paddle, in the bow, and a stroke or two drove them out into the rippling tide. It was growing dark, though the sky overhead was softly blue and there was a glimmer of pale saffron around part of the horizon. To the eastward the moon was just appearing above a bank of cloud. The wind, which had freshened, blew very cold, and Frank shivered until the paddling warmed him and he found that he could spare no thought for anything else. The tide was running over the shallows with a ripple that splashed perilously high about the side of the deeply loaded canoe, and now and then whirling eddies drove them off their course. Once, too, they ran aground, and Harry had to get in knee-deep to shove the craft off, while when they approached the end of the island they had to struggle hard for several minutes against the stream which broke into little frothing waves, during which the canoe got very wet. They came through, however, and reaching smoother water ran the canoe in and pulled her out, after which Frank was about to walk off up the beach when Harry stopped him.

"One learns by experience, and I don't feel like swimming," he observed. "We'll carry her right up and hide her in the bushes."

They did so with some difficulty and Harry afterward waited until Mr. Barclay spoke.

"We came out shooting," said the latter. "I don't see any reason why we shouldn't get a duck."

He turned to Harry, as if to ascertain whether he objected to this, but the boy laughed.

"If you don't know of any, I needn't bother about the thing," he answered. "There's a moderate breeze right off the beach and the guns couldn't be heard far to windward."

"I'm not sure I'd mind them being heard if anybody chanced to be about. It might save the inquisitive stranger from wondering what we were doing here, and the excuse strikes me as a nicer one than going swimming late at night in front of a Siwash rancherie."

Harry chuckled. "Wait until you fall over your boot tops into a pool, or follow a crippled duck through the water."

"I shall endeavor to avoid the first thing," said Mr. Barclay. "There's a remedy for the other, so long as I've two assistants."

They went back to the beach and waited there some time until Frank heard a regular beat of wings, and a drawn-out wedge of dusky bodies appeared above the trees dotted upon the sky. He was farthest from them and he watched Mr. Barclay, who had brought a gun with him, standing, an indistinct, half-seen figure thirty or forty yards away. At last the man threw up his arms, there was a quick yellow flash, a crash, and then a second streak of flame leaping from the smoke. After that there followed two distinct and unmistakable thuds, and Frank pitched up his gun as Harry fired. He heard two jarring reports and running forward saw Mr. Barclay pick up a bird that had fallen almost at his feet.

"There's another over yonder," the latter remarked.

Harry found it in a minute or two and handed it to him.

"One with each barrel!" he said, and added with a rueful laugh, "I don't see any more about."

"Then I think we'll take a look around the island," Mr. Barclay answered.

He left the beach with the boys, but they dropped behind him and let him take the lead when they reached the scrubby firs which were scattered more or less thickly about the rocky ground. Frank fancied that Harry had some reason for doing this and the supposition was confirmed when Mr. Barclay stopped a moment beside a brake of withered fern and then, after stooping down, carefully skirted it as he went on again. The sky was clear, and though the moon was in its first quarter it shed a faint elusive light.

"That man can shoot, and it looks as if he was quite as smart at picking up a trail," said Harry in a low tone. "Anyway, if I'd been looking for a stranger's tracks I'd have tried yonder fern and I'd have been as particular not to smash any of it down as he was. I've an idea he must have chuckled sometimes when I got guying him." He paused and added thoughtfully, "It's the kind of fool thing you're apt to do unless you're careful."

After this they spent a considerable time wandering up and down a portion of the island, though Frank fancied that Mr. Barclay, who asked Harry a question now and then, had some purpose that guided him. The moonlight was too dim and the shadows among the trees too dense for him to follow a trail steadily, but he seemed to be prospecting for likely places where footprints or broken-down undergrowth might be found. At length they reached a little stony hollow, with a rock that rose some six or seven feet on one side and dark firs clustering close about it. Here Mr. Barclay stopped and looked about him before he turned to Harry.

"Now," he said, "this is a spot that could be easily described and located by anybody who happened to be told about it. That rock would make a first-class mark. If you had anything to bury for somebody else to dig up, where would you put it?"

Harry walked about the place, stepping carefully upon

the stones and avoiding the scattered underbrush, until he reached a clump of withered fern.

"Right here," he replied, and kneeling down pulled some of the yellow fronds about. Then he looked up sharply. "This stuff's very dead and it's lying flat," he exclaimed. "Farther on the stems aren't broken and some of them don't seem quite dried up yet."

Frank acknowledged that these were things he would not have noticed, but Mr. Barclay nodded.

"Somebody else may have fixed on the same spot as you have done," he said. "It's possible, though I don't think it's more than that. There might be half a dozen similar places on the island, but if you'll handle the fern carefully it wouldn't do any harm to make a hole."

They had brought a light spade with them, and after Harry had cleared the ground Frank set to work with it. He had taken out only a few shovelfuls of soil and shingle when he gave a cry of surprise as he struck something that seemed more solid.

Harry and Mr. Barclay stooped down beside him. The latter struck a match and lighted a piece of paper he took from his pocket, and before it went out Frank had cleared the soil away from the top of a small wooden case.

"It's rather more than I could have reasonably expected," said Mr. Barclay, "but when you haven't much to act upon it's wise to make the most of what you've got and leave the rest to chance. Now you may as well shovel that dirt back."

"Aren't you going to take the thing out?" Frank asked in astonishment.

"No," replied Mr. Barclay, "I don't think it's necessary. It wouldn't be the first time I'd seen opium and we don't want to leave too plain a trail behind us. As we have spent some time on the island already, hadn't you better get to work?"

Frank flung back the soil and when he had finished Harry replaced the loose fern which he had carefully laid aside. He did not, however, seem satisfied with the way he had arranged it and when he looked up at Mr. Barclay his manner was diffident.

"I'm afraid I can't do any better in the dark," he said.

"It will probably be dark when the next man comes along," Mr. Barclay answered. "Anyway, the first breeze of wind or heavy rain will straighten things up. In the meanwhile we'll get back to the sloop."

They turned away, but they had scarcely gone a hundred yards when Mr. Barclay put his hand into his pocket and stopped.

"I've dropped my pipe," he said. "It was rather a good one."

"Then I know where it is," Frank broke in. "You must have pulled it out with the paper. I heard something fall, but I was too interested to bother about it. If you'll wait, I'll go back and get it."

The others sat down when he left them, but he spent some minutes scrambling about near the fern before the faint gleam of a silver band upon the pipe caught his eye. Picking it up he turned back to rejoin his companions, and a few moments later he reached an opening between the firs by which they had left the hollow. The trees rose in black and shadowy masses on either side, but their ragged tops cut sharply against the sky, and a faint, uncertain light shone down into the gap between them. Soon after he strode into it Frank stopped abruptly, for there was a crackle of dry twigs and a soft rustle somewhere in front of him, and he could think of no reason why Harry or Mr. Barclay should come back. If they had wanted him to do anything they could have called him.

He felt his nerves tingle as he stood and listened. The sound had ceased and he could only hear the wind among

the firs whose tops rustled eerily. But presently the unmistakable fall of a heavy foot came out of the shadows. Then he shrank back instinctively a pace or two into deeper gloom, for there was no doubt that somebody was approaching, and while he waited a black figure appeared in the opening not far in front of him. The faint light was behind the man and he showed up against it dim and indistinct, but Frank realized that he was not Mr. Barclay. He looked taller and less heavily built. Then the boy dropped noiselessly and held his breath, for a brittle branch had cracked under him. The stranger stopped and seemed to be gazing about him.

He moved on again, however, and Frank turned his face toward the ground, fearing that it might show white in the gloom, but it was only by a determined effort that he held himself still and mastered the desire to crawl back farther into the shadow. He knew that if he yielded to it he would be on his feet in another moment and might break away into the bush or do something else which he would afterward regret. He realized that Mr. Barclay and Harry must have seen the stranger and had for some reason kept out of sight and let him go by.

In the meanwhile the man was drawing nearer and Frank made out that he was carrying something. It seemed almost impossible that he could pass without seeing the boy, and the effort it cost the latter to lie still became more arduous. It would have been an unspeakable relief even to spring up and face the stranger with empty hands. Then he drew level, and once more Frank set his lips as he listened to the footsteps. At every moment he expected them suddenly to stop. They continued, however, and although, since he dared not turn, he could not see the man now, it was clear that he had passed.

Frank waited a minute or two longer and then rose softly with a gasp of fervent relief. He was annoyed to feel that he was still quivering with the tension and

he stood still a few moments to regain his composure before he went quietly back toward his companions. As he neared the spot where he had left them Mr. Barclay stepped out from behind a tree.

"You met that man?" he asked.

"Yes," said Frank, "that is, I saw him coming and kept out of the way. He walked close by me and I think he was carrying a spade."

"He was," Mr. Barclay assented. "I was afraid he might surprise you, but we couldn't shout and warn you without alarming him, which I didn't want to do for one or two reasons. We'll wait here until he's through with the business that brought him."

He drew Frank farther back among the trees and soon after they sat down a faint rustling followed by a clatter of stones reached them from the hollow. There was no doubt that the man was digging up the case. Harry, who was lying near Frank's feet, moved restlessly and at length he rose.

"That fellow's certainly one of the gang," he said. "I don't see why we shouldn't get him. Frank and I could work around behind the hollow and head him off while you walk in."

"Well," said Mr. Barclay dryly, "what would follow?"

"You could have him sent up."

"I daresay I could. What would be the use of it?"

"You'd have got one of them, anyway."

"Sure," said Mr. Barclay, "and I'd have scared off all the rest. I suppose I must be greedy, but I wouldn't be content with one bush chopper who probably only takes a hand in now and then. As I believe I told you, I'm after the whole gang."

Harry said nothing further for a while, and then he stopped and listened.

"He's coming back," he whispered.

The sound of footsteps came out of the shadow, and

presently Frank saw a dusky figure pass among the trees carrying something upon its shoulder besides the spade. They waited until there was silence again and then moved quietly back to the beach, from which they saw a canoe cross the channel. Half an hour later they paddled across and duly reached the sloop.

"If that man had known she was here he would probably not have gone," Mr. Barclay observed. "As he didn't see her when there was a little light left, it's reasonable to suppose he couldn't have noticed her coming back in the dark, and on the whole I'm satisfied with the result of the trip. But it might be better if you went somewhere else for your flight shooting after this."

Then they set the mainsail and started back for the cove, keeping close in along the beach.

CHAPTER XX

MR. WEBSTER'S SLASHING

A MONTH passed, which the boys spent quietly in grubbing up stumps and chopping. Then Mr. Oliver suggested that they go over to Mr. Webster's ranch and burn off his slashing, as he had promised its absent owner to send them. He added that they could camp there for the night and get a little hunting when they had done the work. There was a nipping air when they started early in the morning, each with a packet of provisions and a blanket upon his shoulder, and the newly turned clods in the clearing were iron-hard. The Pacific Slope is warmer in winter than the Atlantic coast, but there are times when the cold snaps are sharp enough in its northern part, and the boys were glad to plunge into the shelter of the woods where the frost was less stinging.

They reached the ranch without much trouble, and when they stopped at the slip rails Frank, who had not been there before, looked about him. The bush clearings are much alike, but this one was smaller than Mr. Oliver's. A little, very rudely built log house stood at one end with thick timber creeping close up behind it. There was also an unusual quantity of underbrush among the stumps near the door, which Frank had occasion to notice more particularly later. In the meanwhile it struck him that the place had an uncared-for look and Harry seemed to share his opinion.

"Webster's a very ordinary rancher," he remarked. "He can't stay with a thing and finish it. When he's about halfway through he lets up and starts something

else. Any other man would have grubbed out all that withered stuff about the house and chopped back the bush behind it. It's not safe to have big trees growing so close."

"Why?" asked Frank.

"Because of the fires. They come along every now and then. It's lucky there's no wind to speak of, because I wouldn't put a light to this slashing if there was."

Frank glanced at the belt of fallen timber behind the fence on one side of the clearing. It had been badly cut and some of the trees lay across each other, while only a few of the branches had been sawed off and the undergrowth had not been mowed. If the fall had not been a dry one it would have been difficult to burn the slashing. Then he glanced up at the leaden-gray sky above the pine tops and fancied that it looked threatening. The dense wall of somber sprays seemed unusually harsh of aspect, and there was something curious about the light. Everything was gray and raw-edged, and he shivered, for the faint wind had blown across a wilderness of snowy mountains.

"It's not the kind of day for hanging round," he said. "Let's get to work."

Entering the house they found a can of coal oil and plenty of rags, for a heap of worn-out clothing lay in a corner.

"They'll hold oil and that's about all they're good for," Harry remarked. "I expect it's months since Webster pitched them there with the idea that he might mend them sometime."

Frank carried out one or two of the duck garments, and when they had torn them up and soaked them in coal oil he and Harry set about lighting fires here and there in the slashing, after which they stood near the door of the house and watched the conflagration. The fires spread rapidly, and one side of the clearing was

soon wrapped in crackling flame that worked backward from the neighborhood of the fence, licking up branches and undergrowth as it neared the bush. That did not stop it, for the fire had flung out advance guards which leaped forward swiftly through the withered fern and hurled themselves in crimson waves upon the standing trunks. They seemed to splash upon them, flinging up fountains of blazing brands and sparks that seized upon the lower sprays and sprang aloft until each assaulted tree was wrapped in fire from base to summit. The conflagration made the draught it needed, and by and by it roared in what seemed to Frank malicious triumph as it pressed onward into the forest under a cloud of rolling smoke. Where it would stop he did not know, but he was almost uncomfortably impressed by the spectacle.

"It's a full-power burn," said Harry approvingly. "Guess it's going to clean up this slashing. And now we'll look around and see if Webster's left anything we can make our dinner in."

There was a stove in the house, but they soon discovered that it did not burn well, and Harry glanced disgustedly at the spider Frank discovered.

"A hole in the bottom of it!" he said contemptuously. "That's the kind of thing Webster uses. I'll be astonished if you don't find another hole in the kettle. You had better go along to the well and fill it."

In a few minutes Frank came back with the kettle, which fortunately did not leak, and Harry set it on the stove and laid a piece of pork in the spider, which he tilted on one side.

"It's going to be about an hour before that kettle boils, and, though I feel like doing it, there's no use in straightening up this shack in the meanwhile because the man would muss it up again as soon as he comes back. There's a slough beyond the rise yonder, and as

it lies to windward we might get a shot at something. We could be back before dinner's ready."

Frank would have preferred to stay where he was, as he had already done a good morning's work. He assented, however, and accompanied Harry up a steep and very rough slope and down the opposite side of it. When they reached the bottom they plunged into a waste of tall grass and half-decayed vegetation among the roots of which the frost had not penetrated. As the result of this they sank to the knees here and there, and Frank more than once fell down. He soon had enough of it, but he was beginning to realize that there was very little worth doing in the bush which could be accomplished, so to speak, with one's gloves on. The small rancher and hunter must expect to get wet and ragged, as well as weary and dirty, and must face the unpleasantness cheerfully and mend his clothes afterward. The only other course was to stay in the cities.

Presently Harry discovered the tracks of a deer leading out of the valley and pointed them out to his companion.

"You won't mind waiting for your dinner?" he asked.

"No — not very much," Frank answered dubiously.

This satisfied Harry, who led the way up the hillside, and it seemed to Frank that they scrambled over fallen logs and branches and through thick undergrowth for the greater part of an hour before they crept carefully down again to another hollow. Though they floundered all around it there was no sign of the deer, and Frank was relieved when his companion intimated that they might as well go back to the ranch. Dinner was the first thought in both their minds when they reached it, but it struck Frank that the fire had become a tremendous conflagration and he noticed that a dense cloud of smoke was blowing across the clearing.

"It's a real fierce burn and there's more wind than

there was, but we'll get a meal before we look around," Harry remarked.

There were, however, one or two difficulties in the way of their doing this. The kettle had boiled nearly dry, and the pork had disappeared through the burned-out bottom of the spider. Harry said that he could manage to fry another piece on the rim of it if Frank would refill the kettle, and eventually they sat down to dinner and spent a long while over it. Then Harry got up reluctantly.

"I guess we had better see what the fire's doing," he observed.

Frank was almost appalled when he reached the doorway. The whole clearing was thick with smoke, out of which there shot up a furious wall of fire that rose and fell with a crackle resembling volleys of riflery and a roaring even more disconcerting. What was worse, it seemed to be creeping into the thick bush behind the house, and Harry, running a few paces toward the corner of the building, stopped aghast with the red light flickering on his dismayed face.

"Dad promised he'd get Webster's slashing burned, but it wasn't in the contract that we'd burn off his house," he said. "We'll have to hustle. See if there's an ax and grubhoe in that woodshed."

Frank found the tools, and while he attacked the larger bushes near the back of the house, Harry began to cut down the undergrowth in front of it. By and by Frank came back and they dragged the brush away toward the clearing where it could burn harmlessly, but the smoke grew more blinding and every now and then a shower of sparks fell about the boys. Fires sprang up among the underbrush, and falling upon them with the ax and spade they savagely thrashed them out. Frank burned his hands in doing so, but there was no time to trouble about that and he toiled on, coughing

and choking, until at last they were forced to stop for breath.

They stood close in front of the house, with a mass of withered fern and half-burned brush smoldering in front of them, while a sheet of fire rose and fell amidst dense clouds of smoke behind the building. The daylight appeared to be dying out, but Frank could not be sure of that, because it was almost dark one moment as the smoke rolled about them and the next they stood dazzled by a flood of radiance.

"We have done 'most all we can," said Harry wearily. "It was the wind getting up that made the trouble — I should have noticed it — but if it stands for the next half hour we ought to save the house. The fire's eating back into the bush all the while."

"Should we get any of the things out?" Frank asked.

"I'm not smart at handling hot stoves, and there's mighty little else in the place," Harry answered with a laugh. "I wouldn't bid a dollar for Webster's pans and crockery, and he made the table and the two chairs. Still, I don't know any reason why we shouldn't sling them out."

Just then the smoke rolled down about the boys in a blinding cloud; there was a great snapping and crackling, and a shower of blazing fragments drove them back thirty or forty yards across the clearing. Presently the smoke thinned, and a row of stripped trunks behind the house was outlined against a tremendous sheet of flame. Frank took off his hat and shook a few red embers from the crown of it.

"When we were getting those rags I noticed a keg behind them," he said.

"A keg?" said Harry sharply.

"A little keg. It looked thick and strongly made."

The red light struck full upon Harry's face, and Frank saw that consternation was stamped upon it.

"Then," he said, "it's full of coarse, tree-splitting powder. Some of the ranchers use it for blowing out stumps. Did you notice whether it had been opened?"

"The head seemed loose and one of the hoops had been started."

"Sure!" said Harry with dismay in his voice. Then he broke out in quick anger: "It's just the kind of thing Webster would leave lying around near his stove, without taking the trouble to head it up again. He'll have some detonators lying loose, too—I've heard he uses giant powder. We've got to bring them out."

They looked at each other with set faces while the sparks whirled about the house, and both were conscious of an almost uncontrollable impulse to vacate the clearing with the greatest possible speed. It was to their credit that they mastered it, and in a moment or two Harry spoke again:

"The sparks shouldn't get at the keg if we put a jacket over it, and one of us could carry all the detonators Webster's likely to have in his pocket."

Frank had heard that the big copper caps which are used to fire giant powder will contain a tremendously powerful fulminate, and he was conscious of a very natural reluctance to carry a number of them about his person through the showers of fiery particles that fell about the building. Indeed, he afterward confessed that if Harry had not been with him nothing would have induced him to approach it. How he screwed up his courage he did not know, but as the flame leaped up again the sight of a strip of blazing fence had its effect. The rest of it had been destroyed, and he felt they must make an effort to save the house.

"It wouldn't take us long to get the powder out," he said with a note of uncertainty in his voice.

Harry sprang forward and Frank was glad that he did so. He realized that this was not a matter for calm discussion, and vigorous action was a relief. Another

cloud of smoke met them as they drew near the house, and the sparks that came flying out of it fell thick about them. The heat scorched their faces and they gasped in the acrid vapor, while Frank's eyes were smarting intolerably when he staggered into the building. There was, however, less smoke inside it, and a fierce light beat in through one window. Flinging the old clothes about they came upon the keg and found that the head was lying loose. Working in desperate haste they forced the top hoop upward and Harry wrapped a woolen garment over the top of the keg. After that he flung everything in a lidless wooden case out upon the floor and pounced upon a little box that fell among the rest.

"Detonators!" he shouted. "What's in the packet near you?"

Frank tore the paper savagely. "It looks like thick black cord."

"Fuse," said Harry. "It's harmless. I don't see any giant powder. Hold on. I'll look around his sleeping room."

He vanished through an inner door and Frank soon heard him throwing things about. The suspense of the next few moments was almost unbearable. A pulsating radiance alternately lighted up the room and grew dim again, and the roar and crackle of the fire set his nerves tingling. Then Harry ran back toward him.

"I can't find any giant powder," he reported, and added, "get hold of the keg. We'll carry it between us."

Frank set his lips as they sprang out of the door with it. The keg was not remarkably heavy, but it was an awkward shape and too big for either of them to carry on his shoulder or beneath his arm. Indeed, Frank felt his hands slipping from its rounded end and he was horribly afraid of dropping it among the patches of smoldering undergrowth and glowing fragments which lay all about him. A few moments later thick smoke whirled about him, and he hardly breathed as he struggled

through it until it blew away again. Then, to his relief, he saw that the house was some distance behind them and they were clear of the worst of the sparks. They went on, however, to the opposite side of the clearing, where they deposited the powder, and then dropped the detonators a little farther on, after which Harry sat down on the frozen ground panting heavily.

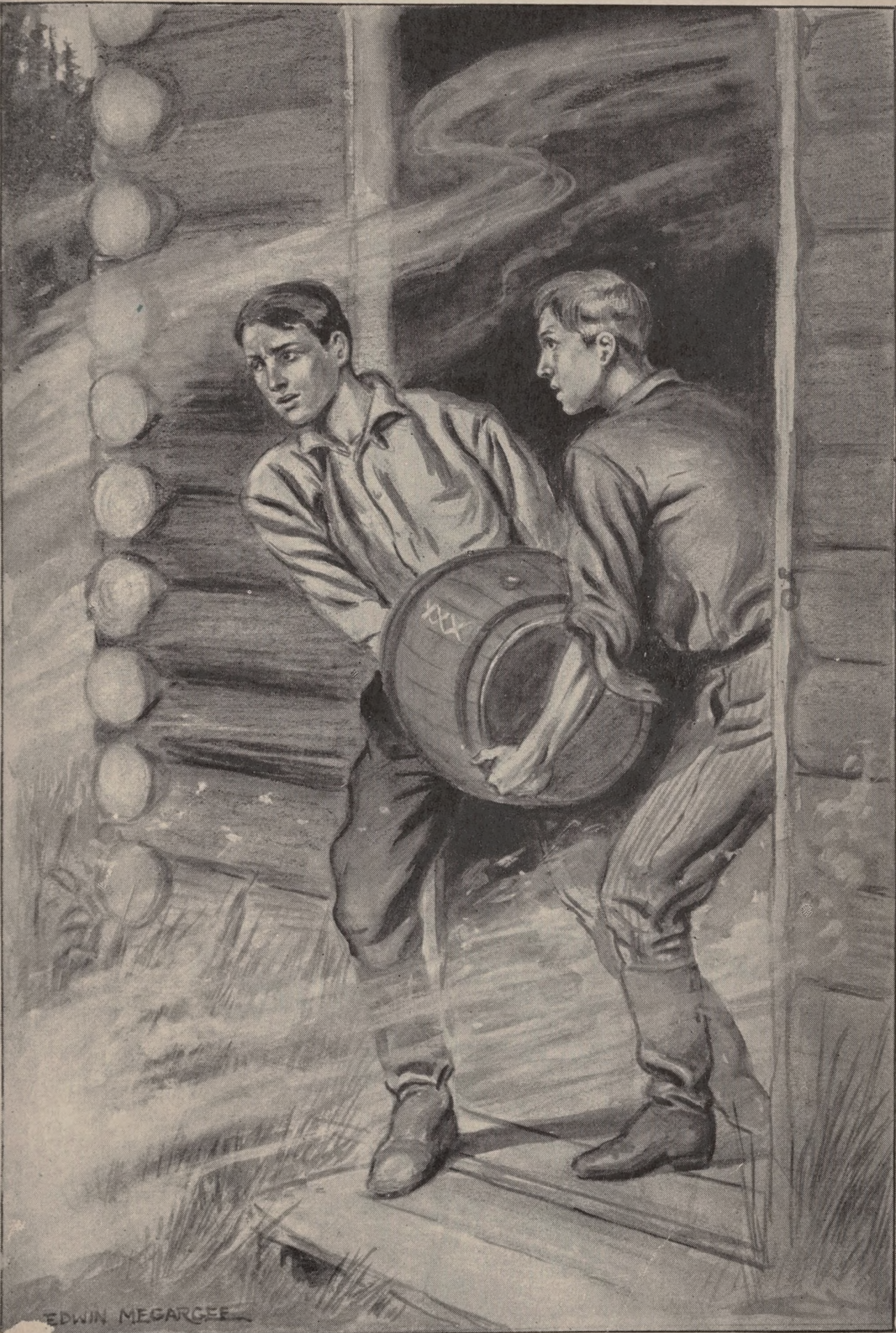
"It's done and I want to get my breath," he said. "The next time I burn a slashing I'll see there's no powder about the place before I begin."

Frank made no answer. He was glad to sit still and recover, for the strain had told on him. Indeed, he was almost sorry when his companion stood up again.

"Perhaps we had better get back and pitch some water on the roof," he suggested. "I was too busy to think of that before."

The wind seemed to be dropping and the sparks were not quite so bad when they reached the house. They found a bucket, and after smashing more of the ice upon the shallow well Frank climbed up on the woodshed which reached to the low roof. The latter was covered with cedar shingles and he wondered why it had not ignited, because the sparks were still dropping upon it and there were several charred spots. This, however, was not a question of much consequence, and Harry kept him busy during the next half hour sluicing the roof with water which he passed up in the bucket. Some of it went over Frank's hands and clothing and it was icy cold, but they worked on steadily while the fire worked back farther from them into the bush. It had burned most fiercely when it had the dry branches in the slashing to supply it, but these were all licked up, and though the small stuff blazed the great standing trunks would not burn. There were already rows of them rising, charred and blackened columns, behind the slashing.

At last Harry called Frank down from the roof.



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"You can let up," he said. "It's hardly likely we'll have any more trouble. There's a lamp and some canned stuff in the shack, and as we'll have to camp here I'll make some coffee. It's quite dark now."

Frank concluded that it had been dark some time, though he had not noticed when dusk crept down. He was glad to find the stove still burning when he entered the house, very wet, and aching in every limb. The kettle was soon boiling, and, as there was no bottom in the spider, Harry, who had found a bag of flour and a can of syrup, contrived to make some flapjacks and what he called biscuit on the top of the stove. He said that this would be no drawback because Mr. Webster never blacked the thing, and Frank found no fault with the cakes when they ate them hot with syrup.

Then they filled up the stove with the full draught on and lounged contentedly beside it while their clothing dried on them. They had had a heavy day, but now that the danger was over they were no more than comfortably weary and the thrill of the last stirring hours remained with them. Frank felt that they had done something worth while that afternoon.

When he diffidently pointed it out Harry laughed.

"Sure!" he agreed. "Still, it's quite likely that Webster will get jumping mad when he sees his fence, though it won't take him many days to split enough rails for a new one."

A little later Frank walked across the room and opened the door. The undergrowth on one side of the clearing gleamed white with frost. On the other side a few big branches still snapped and glowed, and there was a red glare behind the black rows of trunks, but it was now broken by patches of darkness and he could see that the fire was rapidly dying out. He came back with a shiver and sat down in his warm seat beside the stove.

CHAPTER XXI

A NIGHT ON THE SANDS

THERE was a sprinkle of snow upon the ground, and the boys were working in Mr. Oliver's slashing one afternoon a week after their visit to Mr. Webster's ranch when Harry, who had just hauled up a log, stopped his oxen and addressed his father.

"It looks as if it would be a fine night," he remarked.

"Yes," said Mr. Oliver. "I've no fault to find with the weather. We'll get most of the logs piled for burning if it lasts."

Harry smiled at Frank. "Dad's slow to take a hint. I wasn't thinking of the logs."

"I can believe it," Mr. Oliver retorted. "Anyway, they have to be hauled out, and it's easier to do it now than when the soil's soft and boggy."

Frank, who had been heaving the sawed trunks on top of one another with Jake, agreed with the rancher. The big masses of timber slid easily over the snow and they were clean to handle, which was something to be thankful for after the difficulty they had had in moving them when they were foul with clotted mire. The frost, as he had discovered, seldom lasted long in that country, but it was very cold and the firs towered flecked with snow against a clear blue sky.

"I was wondering if there was any reason why we shouldn't try to get a duck to-night," said Harry. "We won't go near the island where the cache is. There's a flat behind the other one to the southward."

"I can think of one reason," his father answered.

"You won't feel like working to-morrow, and there's a good deal of log-hauling to be done."

"We'll be ready to start as usual," persisted Harry.

"Then you can go on that condition, but you'll have to stick to it. I don't mind your getting a few hours' shooting now and then, but I expect you to be ranchers first of all when there's work on hand."

Harry repeated his assurance and Mr. Oliver made no more objections. When they had heaved up the next log Jake turned to the boys.

"There'll be a moon and I guess you're not going to do much on the flats," he said. "You want to cut two very short paddles and put some spruce brush that you can lie on in the canoe. Then if you keep quite flat you might creep up on a flock of ducks in one of the channels. You can't do it if you use the ordinary paddle kneeling."

He split them two flat slabs off the butt of a cedar, but Mr. Oliver, who was chopping nearby, looked around when Harry began to hack them into shape.

"What are those for?" he asked.

"Paddles," Harry answered with some hesitation.

"You're logging just now," said his father dryly.

"I want another tier put up before it's dark."

Harry laid down the half-finished paddles and grinned at Frank.

"I guess dad's quite right, but his way of staying with it gets riling now and then."

Frank laughed. One day when Harry had hurt his knee and there was no work of any consequence on hand, Mr. Oliver had taken him out into the bush, and the boy had a painful recollection of the journey they had made together. No thicket was too dense or thorny for the rancher to scramble through, and he prowled about the steepest slopes and amongst the thickest tangles of fallen logs with the same unflagging persistency until

at the first shot he killed a deer. Mr. Oliver was, as his son and Jake sometimes said, a stayer, one who invariably put through what he took in hand. He was the kind of person Frank aspired to become, though he was discovering that he was not likely to accomplish it by taking things easily. Success, it seemed, could only be attained by ceaseless effort and constant carefulness.

He went on with the logging, though the work was remarkably heavy, and it was an occupation he had no liking for, but he helped Harry to finish the paddles after supper. Then they carried a bundle of spruce twigs down to the canoe, and, though there was not much wind, tied a reef in the sloop's mainsail, which Mr. Oliver had insisted on before they loosed the moorings.

An hour later and shortly before low water they let go the anchor in a lane of water which wound into a stretch of sloppy sand. It was just deep enough for the sloop to creep into with her centerboard up, and the flats ran back from it into a thin mist on either side. It was very cold and the deck glittered in the pale moonlight white with frost. Frank stood up looking about him while Harry arranged the twigs in the canoe, but there was very little to see. The sky was hazy, the moon was encircled by a halo, and wet sand and winding water glimmered faintly. At one point he could dimly make out the dark loom of an island, but there was no sign of the beach in front of him. Though he could feel a light wind on his face, it was very still, except for the ripple of water and the occasional splash of undermined sand falling into the channel, which seemed startlingly distinct. Once he heard a distant calling of wildfowl, but it died away again.

Dropping into the canoe when his companion was ready he took up one of the longer paddles. The water was quite smooth and they made good progress, but Harry did not seem satisfied.

"If I'd had any sense I'd have brought a pole to shove

her with," he complained. "It's handier in shallow water and the ducks seem to be a long way up. A creek that runs out on the beach makes this channel."

Frank paddled on, watching the sloppy banks slide by and the palely gleaming strip of water run back into the haze in front of him until at last it forked off into two branches.

"We'll try this one," said Harry. "I believe it works right around behind the island. The flood should come up that end first, and it ought to drive the feeding birds back over the sands to us."

The water got deeper as they proceeded, for Frank could feel no bottom when he sank his blade, but there was no sign of any duck until at last they heard a faint quacking in the mist. Soon afterward there was a shrill scream as a flock of some of the smaller waders wheeled above their heads.

"Now," said Harry, "we'll try Jake's idea. If the ducks aren't on the water they'll be along the edge of it where the bank's soft. You don't often find them feeding where the sand's dry and hard."

They placed the guns handy, and lying down upon the spruce brush dipped the short blades. Frank found the position a very uncomfortable one to paddle in, and he could not keep his hands from getting wet, though the water was icy cold. They were fast becoming swollen and tingled painfully in the stinging frost. Still, the boys made some progress, and at last looking up at a whisper from Harry, Frank saw a dark patch upon the water some distance in front of him. Harry edged the canoe closer in with the bank, which had a slope of two or three feet on that side.

After that they crept on slowly, because they dared not use much force for fear of splashing, and Frank's wet fingers were rapidly growing useless. The ducks became a little more distinct and he could see other birds moving about in the faint gleam on the opposite bank. Some

of them, standing out against the wet surface, looked extraordinarily large, though he could not tell what they were.

At last a sudden eerie screaming broke out close ahead and Frank started and almost dropped his paddle as a second flock of waders rose from the gloom of the bank. They flashed white in the moonlight as they turned and wheeled on simultaneously slanted wings. Then they vanished for a moment as their dusky upper plumage was turned toward the boys, gleamed again more dimly, and the haze swallowed them. They had, however, given the alarm, and the air was filled with the harsh clamor of startled wildfowl.

"Now!" cried Harry. "Before the ducks get up!"

Frank flung in his paddle and pitched his gun to his shoulder, with the barrel resting on the side of the canoe. It sparkled in the moonlight, distracting his sight, and stung his wet hand, but he could see dark bodies rising from the water ahead. As he pressed the trigger Harry's gun blazed across the bows, and following the double crash there was an outbreak of confused sound, the sharp splash of webbed feet that trailed through water, a discordant screaming, and the beat of many wings. Indistinct objects whirled across the moonlight and as Frank with stiffened fingers snapped open the breach Harry's gun once more flung out a train of yellow sparks. Then the smoke hung about them smelling curiously acrid in the frosty air and they seized the paddles to drive the canoe clear of it. When they had left it behind them the lane of water was empty except for one small dark patch upon it, and the clamor of the wildfowl was dying away. They had paddled a few yards when Frank made out that something was stumbling away from them along the shadowy bank, but they were almost abreast of it before he could get another shell into the chamber. The bird lay still when he fired, and Harry picked up the duck on the water, after which he ran the canoe ashore.

"So far as I could see, the rest of them headed across the flat toward the other channel," he said. "It looks soft here, but, as you'll have to get out to pick up the duck yonder, it might be a good idea if you followed them over the sand. I'll work along the creek and it's likely that any birds I put up will fly over you."

This seemed possible to Frank, who realized that the walk would warm him, and he stepped out of the canoe into several inches of slushy sand. Floundering through it, he picked up the duck and threw it to Harry, who shoved the canoe out.

"I won't go far and you had better head back toward the forks in half an hour or so," he said. "I'll probably be waiting."

The canoe slid away, and Frank felt sorry that he had left her when he reached the harder top of the bank. The level flat which stretched away before him into the mist looked very desolate, and the deep stillness had a depressing effect on him. He also remembered that in another hour or less the flood tide would come creeping back across the dreary waste. He could, however, think of no reasonable excuse for rejoining his companion, and turning his back on the channel he set out across the sand. Nothing moved upon it as he plodded on, the silence seemed to be growing deeper, and he had an idea that the haze was denser than it had been. Still, he determined to make the round Harry had suggested and quickened his pace.

It was some time later when he heard a double report that sounded a long way off and he stopped to listen, when the clamor of the wildfowl broke out again. It died away, but he fancied that a faint, rhythmic sound stole out of the silence that followed it. A minute later he was sure that a flight of ducks was crossing the flat and, what was more, that the birds were heading toward him. As yet he could see nothing of them, for there was now no doubt that the mist was thicker. He

crouched down as the sound increased, as it occurred to him that he would be too plainly visible standing up in the moonlight on the level flat.

The sound drew nearer, growing in a steady crescendo until he wondered that a duck's wing could make so much noise, and at last a number of shadowy objects broke out of the mist, flying low and swiftly in regular formation. The gun flashed, and the ducks swept on and vanished, all but one which came slowly fluttering down out of the mist.

Frank spent nearly a minute fumbling with stiffened fingers while he crammed in another shell, and then saw that the duck was running across the sand some way off. Closing the breach he set off after it, and had got a little nearer when it rose, fluttered awkwardly, and fell again, though it was able to make good progress on its feet. Twice he got within sixty yards of it, but on one occasion it flew a little way, and on the second it swam across a long pool which he had to run around. Indeed, it led him a considerable distance before he brought it down.

Picking it up he stopped and looked about him. It was pleasant to feel a little warmer, but there was nothing to guide him toward the other fork of the channel except the drift of the mist and the chill of the wind upon one side of his face, and he could not be sure that the wounded bird had led him straight. The flat was level and bare except for little pools of water on which were glistening filaments of ice. It was, however, too cold to stand still with wet feet and consider, and deciding that the sooner he got down to the forks the sooner he would be back on board the sloop, he set off briskly. He had had enough of wandering about that desolate waste.

At last, to his relief, he saw a faint silvery glimmer ahead in the mist, and turning off he struck the channel a little lower down. There was no sign of a duck or

anything else, but he was by no means sorry for this, for his one idea was to get back to the forks as soon as possible, and the surest way of doing it was to follow the creek. It appeared to be a considerable distance, though he walked as fast as he could, splashing straight through shallow pools and slipping in half-frozen mud, and when at last he reached the spot where the channels branched off he could see nothing of Harry or the canoe. What troubled him almost as much was the fact that the stream was now flowing inland, and after a quick glance at it he shouted with all his might. His voice rang along the water and level sand, but though he called again no answer came out of the drifting mist. Then he slipped his hand into his pocket to get a cartridge and drew it out again with an exclamation of disgust, recollecting that he had only picked up three or four loose shells in the canoe.

For a moment he stood still considering, and it occurred to him that the situation was not a pleasant one. The flood tide was making and he did not know how far off the beach was, while he had no desire to spend the night in the woods. He could not see the island, and in order to reach it he would have to cross the main channel, which, as he remembered, was moderately deep. On the whole it seemed wiser to wade through the smaller fork and, if Harry did not overtake him in the meanwhile, try to get on board the sloop. She would float in very shallow water with her centerboard up, and he had touched bottom with the canoe paddle a few yards away from her.

When he had arrived at this decision he plunged into the water, which immediately rose above the top of his long boots. It was horribly cold, but this caused him less concern than the fact that it rippled strongly against his legs, which made it clear that he must get down to the sloop as fast as possible. He was over his knees before he got across, and then he ran his hardest along

the edge of the channel, which seemed to be growing wider at every moment. The palely gleaming water was perfectly smooth, but it was moving with an ominous speed.

He grew breathless, but he did not slacken the pace. He went straight, splashing through trickling water and into pools, while he strained his eyes for the first glimpse of the sloop, but he could only see the mist which hid the sand thirty or forty yards in front of him. At last he made out a strip of something solid low down ahead and then what seemed to be a mast, and a few moments later he stopped at the water's edge. There was nothing but water in front of him and it was no longer quite smooth. Little ripples ran along the sand, and one broke about his feet while he gazed at them. It did not recede but splashed on, and when he looked around there was at least a yard of water behind him. Then he struggled with a paralyzing sense of dismay, and strove to keep his head. It was necessary to think and think very hard.

He could not wait where he was with the water deepening about him; while, if he went back and did not find Harry before he reached it, the creek, which he would no longer be able to cross, would head him off. If he followed it up on the near side it would take him away from the canoe, and he did not know how far off the beach was. There was evidently only one thing to be done and that was to get on board the sloop even if he had to swim.

She seemed a horribly long way out, but he splashed in hurriedly, afraid to wait a moment lest his resolution should melt away, and he was soon waist-deep with a strong stream swirling around him. It was almost impossible to keep his feet, the gun hampered him, and the coldness of the water seemed to check his breathing and take the power out of his limbs. He could not go back, however, and face a journey through the mist

across the waste of sand, and setting his lips he struggled on. Twice he was almost swept away, but at last making a savage effort he clutched the stern of the craft and scrambled up on to her deck.

The first thing he did was to light the stove, and when a pleasant warmth began to fill the cabin he was conscious of a strong desire to sit still and dry his clothes. That, unfortunately, was out of the question, and he reluctantly crawled out and stood up on deck. There was nothing but water around him now. It stretched back on every side into the mist, and the only sounds were the soft lap of the tide and the ripple it made flowing over thinly covered sand. Then having already decided that Harry would have some difficulty in paddling against the stream, he set about getting sail upon the craft to go in search of the canoe.

The mainsail looked remarkably big and heavy, and he was thankful that there was a reef in it, which made the task a little easier before he got it up. Then he spent several minutes in very hard work heaving the boat up to her anchor, and bruised his swollen hands in the determined effort it cost him to break it out. After that he set the jib and the sloop slid gently away with the wind abeam of her. He did not know exactly where she was going, but he shouted as loudly as he could every now and then, and at last there was a faint answering cry.

He called again and the cry rose more clearly, after which he hauled the sheet and changed his course, and by and by the canoe appeared out of the haze close ahead. A few moments later Harry paddled alongside, and handing up the ducks and his gun made the canoe fast before he turned to Frank.

"Do you know where you're heading for?" he asked.

"No," Frank confessed. "I've only a notion that it's in toward the land."

"Then we'll drop the jib and pitch the anchor over.

We'll have to wait until the stream slackens before we get out again."

They followed his suggestion and Frank was glad indeed to creep back into the cozy cabin.

"This is uncommonly nice," drawled Harry, sitting down with a smile of content. "It was horribly cramping in the canoe and my hands were 'most too cold to paddle."

"What kept you?" inquired Frank.

"I must have gone farther than I intended and when I turned back the tide was running up so strong I could hardly make head against it. I was getting scared about you when I reached the forks and saw how the water was spreading on the sand. After that I didn't spare myself, but I was mighty glad to hear your shout."

"Did you get any more ducks?"

"No," said Harry, "I had only one shot—a long one."

Frank, who told him to make some coffee, stripped off part of his clothes and dressed himself in an old blanket, after which they sat beside the stove for an hour or so, until Harry crawled out and said that there was a little more wind and the mist was thinning.

Shortly after this they heaved the anchor and started again, but once more the wind fell light and a couple of hours had passed and they were almost frozen when they reached the cove below the ranch. The house was dark when they crept into it and went straight to bed, while it cost Frank a determined effort to get up before daylight next morning. His clothes were still damp and he felt sore and aching, but he took his place with the others when they sat down to breakfast.

Logging seemed a particularly unpleasant task that day, but he had to go on with it, and he fancied that Mr. Oliver, with whom it was necessary to keep pace, worked harder than he usually did. Frank was completely ex-

hausted when as darkness fell they went back to the ranch.

"Are you going out again after ducks to-night?" Mr. Oliver asked him.

"No," said Frank ruefully, "I feel as if it would take me a week to get over the last trip."

"I'm not very much astonished," Mr. Oliver answered with a soft laugh. "Still, I don't mind admitting that you stood up to your work to-day."

CHAPTER XXII

THE ULTIMATUM

THE frost soon broke up, and it was raining heavily one afternoon, when the boys were at work in an excavation they had driven under a big fir stump shortly after their shooting trip. Frank, very wet and dirty, lay propped up on one elbow with his head and shoulders inside the hole, chopping awkwardly at a root. His legs and feet were in a pool of water outside and there was very little room to swing the ax, while at every blow the saturated soil fell down on him. Grubbing out a stump in wet weather is a singularly disagreeable task.

Harry crouched close beside him where he was partly sheltered from the rain by the network of roots which rose above his head. The boys had spent most of the day cutting through those which ran along the surface of the ground and digging to get at the rest, until they had been forced to drive a tunnel to reach one or two which went vertically down, for it was an unusually large stump. At last when his ax shoved through the obstacle Frank paused for breath, and, as it was getting dark in the excavation, Harry lighted a piece of candle. The light fell upon a massive shaft of wet wood which sank into the ground.

"Nobody fixed as we are could chop through that," he grumbled. "It's the big taproot, and it would take most of another day's shoveling to make room to get at it with the crosscut. It looks as if we'd have to put some giant powder in. Where's that auger?"

Frank reached out for the boring tool, which resem-

bled a huge corkscrew, only that instead of a handle it had a hole at its upper end for the insertion of a short lever.

"I'll bore while you get things ready, if you like," he suggested. "Do you often use dynamite?"

"We never fire a shot when we can help it, though there are ranchers who get through a lot of the stuff. Giant powder's expensive, and, though labor's expensive, too, you have to figure whether a shot's going to pay. It's worth while if it will save you grubbing most of the day. Slant the hole you bore a little upward while I go along for the magazine."

Harry crawled out of the excavation, and Frank slipped a crossbar through the hole in the auger, driving the point of the latter into the wood. It went in easily, but the work grew harder as he twisted it round and round, kneeling with his shoulders against the roots, while the candle flickered and big drops of water trickled down on him. The position was a cramping one, and his wet hands slipped upon the crossbar, but he had become accustomed to doing unpleasant things, and it was evident that one could not clear a ranch without grubbing stumps.

By and by Harry came back, and telling him to hold the light carefully, produced what looked rather like a yellow candle, and a piece of black cord with a copper cap nipped down on the end of it.

"That's the detonator," he said, pointing to the cap. "You saw one or two of them at Webster's ranch."

"I didn't feel inclined to stop and examine them then," Frank answered with a laugh.

"They're very like the caps used for guns, only, as you see, they're bigger, and it's wise to be careful how you pinch one down on the fuse. The stuff they fill the end with is mighty powerful. So's giant powder, but it's peculiar because it will only burn unless you fire it with something that makes a bang. At least, that's

what it does in a general way. The trouble is you can never be quite sure of it."

He worked the soft yellow substance over the detonator, after which he thrust it gently into the auger hole and pressed a handful of soil down on it. Frank was thankful when he had finished, for having heard of the tremendous powers of the giant powder he did not care to be shut up with it among that network of roots. Then Harry, straightening the strip of black fuse which projected from the hole, took a quick glance about him.

"We'll make sure we can get out before we light it," he remarked, taking the candle and holding it to the fuse. "You don't want to stay around once the fuse is burning. Crawl back and hold those roots up out of my way."

The candle was by this time sputtering and sparkling, and Frank swung himself up out of the hole and set off madly across the clearing, shouting to Mr. Oliver and Jake, who were at work not far away. His companion, following close behind, stopped him presently.

"Hold on!" he shouted with a laugh. "You needn't run right down to the cove. Giant powder's kind of local in its action, and that charge isn't going to turn the whole clearing upside down."

They waited behind a neighboring stump, and a few minutes later Frank, who had felt himself thrilled with expectation, was grievously disappointed. He had looked for a spectacular result, but there was only a dull, heavy thud, a sound of rending and splitting, and a wisp of vapor out of which a little soil flew up.

"Now," said Harry, "we'll go along and have a look, but we'll work around the stump and come at it down the wind."

"Why?" Frank asked.

His companion snickered. "Only that it would probably knock you over, I'd let you go and see. It's wise to keep clear of the gases after firing giant powder.

They haven't the same effect on everybody, but most men who get a whiff of them want to lie down for the rest of the day."

They approached the stump cautiously on its windward side, but there was not much to see. It appeared to have been split and was slightly raised, but it had certainly not been blown to fragments, as Frank had expected.

"Do you think the shot has cut the root?" he asked.

"No," said Harry with a smile, "you couldn't call it cutting. It has melted it, swallowed it, blotted it right out. You'll find very little of that root to-morrow, and there won't be any pieces lying round either."

He broke off and grabbed Frank's arm as the latter moved toward the other side of the stump.

"Come back!" he warned. "The gas is hanging about yet."

Frank noticed a rather unpleasant smell, and was conscious of a pain in his head, but it passed off as they crossed the clearing together. As it was getting too dark to work, Mr. Oliver and Jake joined them before they reached the house. They changed their clothes when they went in, and after toiling in the rain all day Frank was glad to sit down dressed in dry things at the well-spread table. The room was very cozy with its bright lamp and snapping stove, and the doleful wail of the wind and the thrashing of the rain outside emphasized its cheerfulness. He felt languidly content with himself and the simple, strenuous life he led. For the most part, though they had occasional adventures, it was an uneventful one, and some time had passed since they had heard anything of the dope runners. He wondered what had become of them, or if they had found smuggling unprofitable and had given it up.

Supper was about half finished when there was a knock at the door and the dog rose with a growl. Harry seized the animal's collar just as a man appeared in the

entrance. His clothes were black with water and a trickle of it ran from the brim of the soft hat he held in one hand. He was a young man and the paleness of his face suggested that he was from the cities.

"Is it far to Carthew Creek?" he inquired.

"Eight or nine miles," Mr. Oliver replied. "The trail's very bad and you'll have some trouble in keeping it on a night like this. Have you any reason for going straight through?"

"I believe a steamboat calls to-morrow and I thought of going back with her. I've had about enough of these bush trails."

"Then we'll put you up," said Mr. Oliver obligingly. "You can get on again first thing in the morning. You're wet enough now, aren't you?"

The stranger admitted that he was, but seemed to hesitate.

"I don't want to trouble Miss Oliver," he said. "Still, as it happens, I've a message for you."

Mr. Oliver said that he would give him some dry clothes, and the two withdrew to get them. They came back a few minutes later and sat down at the table. The stranger made an excellent meal, and Mr. Oliver waited until he had finished before he asked a question:

"Have you walked in?"

"From the settlement," the other answered. "As I expected to get back by the steamboat, I left my hired horse with Porteous at the store."

"Porteous doesn't keep the store."

"The other fellow got hurt chopping a week or so ago. A log or a big branch fell on him, and they sent him off to Seattle. Porteous is running the business until he gets better."

Frank fancied that Mr. Oliver was displeased at this, but there was no change in his manner toward his visitor.

"Is he running the post office, too?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I had to tell him something about a letter."

"You mentioned that you had some business with me. I suppose you're looking up orders for fruit trees?"

The stranger smiled. "I'm a store clerk by profession. Out of a job at present. Name's T. Graham Watkins. Now you know me."

He turned to Miss Oliver with a bow, but she made no comment, and he glanced toward the boys.

"We've got to have a talk," he added, addressing Mr. Oliver. "I'm not sure you'd want these young men or your sister to hear."

"You can tell it here," said Mr. Oliver dryly. "I can make a guess at your business, and if I'm right I've no objections to the others staying where they are."

"Then it's just this. The folks I represent aren't pleased with you. They've a notion that you've been bucking against them for the last few months and trying to find out things they'd rather keep dark."

"I presume you're referring to the dope runners. Why didn't they come themselves?"

"That's easily answered," said Mr. Watkins. "I understand you haven't seen one of them yet, and they don't want to give you an opportunity of doing so."

Harry grinned at Frank across the table unnoticed by the speaker.

"In my case it doesn't matter," the latter added. "I've merely called to give you a message."

"Aren't you rather hanging fire with it?" Mr. Oliver asked.

"I feel kind of diffident. I don't want to say anything that might alarm your sister."

Miss Oliver smiled. "You needn't hesitate. My brother generally takes me into his confidence, and I don't think either of us is very easily startled."

"Won't you send the boys away, anyhow?"

"No," said Mr. Oliver quietly, "I think I mentioned that I'd rather let them stay."

"Well," said the other, "this is the position. The gentlemen you mentioned can land their stuff near here and get it away through the bush easily; that is, if you'll lie by and take no hand against them. There are other routes, but they're longer and more difficult, and my friends would rather stick to this one if it's possible. The question is how can they make it worth your while to shut your eyes and leave them alone?"

Harry suddenly straightened himself and Frank noticed the quick flush of anger in his face, but Miss Oliver was smiling and the rancher's voice was as tranquil as usual.

"The answer's very simple," he said. "It can't be done."

Mr. Watkins appeared astonished.

"I want you to consider your position," he repeated.

"I may tell you that I considered it carefully some months ago, but there's a point I'd like to mention. Has it struck you that I might promise to fall in with your friends' views and all the same give them away?"

"It was talked about," Mr. Watkins answered. "We decided it wouldn't be in keeping with what we knew about your character, and you'd certainly be sorry you had done it afterward."

"Now we're coming to the second and more important half of the message," said Mr. Oliver.

"You're right," was the answer. "I'm to understand that when you say you won't meet my friends' views it's your last word?"

"Yes," said Mr. Oliver firmly.

"Then my message is a plain one. Let up, or look out. I want you to fix your attention on the last part of it. You have quite a nice place here, a high-class barn and homestead, and a good hay crop, and there's nobody living within some miles of you except Webster."

"Precisely!" said Mr. Oliver. "They cost me a good

deal of very hard work and I shall try to keep them. Now I suppose you've said your piece?"

Mr. Watkins raised his hand as if to beg his forbearance.

"You've heard it all. I only want to add that I'm quite willing to start right now for Carthew if you wish it."

Mr. Oliver laughed naturally and easily.

"No," he said, "you're my guest for the night. After this we'll change the subject and talk about something else." He looked around. "Harry, will you bring the cigar box out?"

Mr. Watkins did not appear to be a brilliant conversationalist, but he discussed politics and railroad extension with his host, and Frank found himself wondering at and admiring the rancher's attitude. He had shown no sign of anger and had never failed in courtesy. Threats had apparently no effect on him, and he had received them with a quiet amusement which appealed in particular to the boy's fancy. It seemed ever so much finer than blustering indignation, but he thought that there would be a striking change in Mr. Oliver's manner if he were ever driven to action.

Mr. Watkins took his departure after breakfast next morning, after which Mr. Oliver wrote two letters before he called the boys.

"I want you to take the sloop and go up to the settlement," he said. "You will mail this letter there. It's to Barclay, though it isn't directly addressed to him."

Harry looked thoughtful.

"Of course," he said hesitatingly, "I'll do that if you wish it, but Porteous is a mean white, isn't he? Mightn't he open the thing?"

"It's possible," Mr. Oliver answered with a smile. "As it happens, I've no great objections to his reading it, and I'm mailing it with him as an experiment. Don't

put it into the box, but hand it to him. When you have done that sail back along the beach and then head right across to Bannington's, where you'll mail this other letter. As you can't be back to-night, you had better take some provisions with you. Start as soon as you can."

The boys were off in half an hour, for the rain had stopped and there was a clear sky and a moderate breeze. As they sailed out of the cove Harry from his place at the helm glanced at his companion with a chuckle.

"When you come to understand him, dad's unique," he said. "Porteous will open that letter. He's mean enough for anything, and it's been my opinion all along that he's in with the gang."

"But won't it give your father's plans away if he reads it?"

"Not much!" said Harry. "Haven't you got hold yet? The letter's about hunting, and there's most likely an order in it for Winchester shells or something else that will put Porteous off the track. He's probably not an expert at opening envelopes, and it won't take Barclay long to tell whether anybody has been tampering with the letter. The other one will go through without being interfered with. They're white at Bannington's."

"That won't get over much of the difficulty, after all," Frank objected. "Won't your father's answer bring Watkins's friends down upon the ranch?"

"It's possible," said Harry. "I've a notion that when they come dad will be ready for them, and I fancy Barclay's nearly through with his trailing."

"You expect he'll make a new move then?"

Harry laughed. "Sure!" he said. "That little, fat man will get everything fixed up without making the least fuss. Then he'll bring his hand down once for all and smash the whole dope-running gang. I don't mind allowing that I was quite wrong about him at the beginning."

They said nothing more upon the subject, and they safely reached the cove next day after a long, cold sail.

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. OLIVER OUTWITS HIS WATCHERS

A DAY or two after they had got back to the ranch Mr. Oliver asked the boys if they would like another trip, and as both of them preferred it to grubbing stumps they paddled off to the canoe with him the same evening. A fresh breeze sprang up as the sun went down, and they had a fast and rather wet sail. Daylight was breaking across the scattered pines when the party left the sloop and walked up a trail within sight of a little lonely settlement.

As they approached it a harsh clanking and the tolling of a bell rose from behind the trees, and they had to wait while a locomotive and a string of freight cars jolted across the trail into a neighboring side track. When the train had passed Mr. Oliver and his companions crossed the rails and entered a desolate flag station, which consisted of a roughly boarded, iron-roofed shack and a big water tank. In front of it was an open space strewn with fir stumps, and beyond the latter three or four frame houses rose among the trees. The door of the shack was shut, and while they stood outside it the sound of an approaching train grew steadily louder and a jet of steam blew noisily from the valve of the locomotive waiting in the side track.

"A Seattle train," said Mr. Oliver. "They don't seem to be flagging her and she probably won't stop."

Frank stood looking about him with a curious stirring of his heart. There was a gaudy poster pasted up on the shack announcing cheap tickets to Seattle, with a line or two about a circus and some attraction at an

opera house. In the meanwhile the scream of a whistle came ringing across the shadowy trees and the boy was troubled by the familiar sights and sounds. The wet rails, the freight cars, and the brilliant poster reminded him of the cities he had turned his back upon some time ago.

Then, though the daylight was rapidly growing clearer, a big blazing lamp broke out from among the firs with a cloud of steam streaming behind it, and a locomotive and a row of clanging cars swept through the depot. The lights from the windows flashed into Frank's face, flickered upon the shack and rows of stumps, and grew dim again, after which the din receded and came throbbing back fainter and fainter. As he listened to it, a sudden fierce longing seized the boy. He wanted to hear the clamor of the cities again, to see the big stores and the hurrying crowds. Almost a year had elapsed since he had even seen a train, and a journey of two or three hours would take him back to the stir and bustle of civilization away from the constant monotonous toil with ax and saw in the lonely bush.

He wondered what his people were doing in Boston. In the winter season there were festivities and gayety there, and he had once enjoyed them with his old companions who had most likely forgotten him. Some had gone into business, two were at Harvard, and another had entered the army; but he stood, dressed in miry long boots and old well-mended garments still damp with salt water, in a little desolate depot in the wilderness. He fancied that he was justified in feeling rather sorry for himself.

Then with an effort he drove these thoughts away. After all, his place was not in the cities. He had no money and there was nobody to give him a fair start in life, while he admitted that it was very doubtful that he had any talent for business. He might, perhaps, become a clerk or something of the kind, but it once more occurred to him that he was better off in the bush.

Indeed, though he scarcely realized this, the bush had already made a striking change in him, and it is possible that his eastern friends would have had trouble in recognizing him as the pale lad they had sent away to Minneapolis. His face was bronzed and resolute, he was taller, tougher, and broader around the chest, and he could now toil all day at a task which would once have broken him down in a couple of hours. Then he started as he noticed that Mr. Oliver was looking at him with a smile.

"You seem to be thinking rather hard," the rancher remarked.

"I was," Frank admitted hesitatingly. "It was the train that put the ideas into my mind."

"I fancied it might be something of that description," said Mr. Oliver. "She'd soon have taken you up to Seattle, and nowadays it's a very short run to Chicago, where you could get on to one of the Atlantic flyers. I suppose you feel that you'd like to make the journey?"

"I did — for a minute or two," Frank confessed with an embarrassed smile. "Then, of course, I realized that it was impossible."

Somewhat to his astonishment, Mr. Oliver laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"The wish was very natural, but stay where you are, my lad. There's more room out here in the Western bush, and you're making progress. This is going to be a great country, and you won't be sorry you came out in a few more years."

"I'm not sorry now," Frank answered sturdily, with a flush in his face.

Mr. Oliver turned away as the agent opened the door of his shack, and they went into the little, untidy office.

"I want to send a message south," said Mr. Oliver, writing something on a form. "It's a code address. I suppose I could get an answer in an hour or so?"

"Oh, yes," said the agent. "They'll be beginning to

move about in Seattle now, and if the man's in his office there'll be no delay. In the meanwhile they would give you a good breakfast at the hotel."

Mr. Oliver thanked him, and as they left the depot two men whom they had not noticed hitherto met them. Mr. Oliver glanced at them sharply, but he did not speak, and a few minutes later they sat down to an excellent meal in the primitive wooden hotel. When they had finished the proprietor strolled in and sat down for a chat with them.

"Is there much going on about the place?" Mr. Oliver asked, offering him a cigar.

"Yes," said the hotelkeeper, accepting the proffered cigar with alacrity, "we've struck quite a boom. There's a man clearing a lot of ground for a fruit ranch and putting up a smart frame house. Then they're cutting a couple of new trails. The boys are making good wages and they're all of them busy."

"I saw two men just now who didn't seem to have much to do," said Mr. Oliver carelessly, and Harry gave his companion a nudge with his elbow.

"They don't belong here," was the answer. "One of them lives down the beach and does some fishing with his boat. The other man came in from the South yesterday on the cars, and I don't know what he's after. I told him I could put him on to a job and he said he didn't want it."

"As they're together, he's probably going in for fishing with the first one," Mr. Oliver suggested.

The hotelkeeper pursed his lips and looked as if he were solving a hard problem.

"It's a puzzle to me how Larry makes a living. It's only now and then he sends a little fish away, and I can't see what he'd do with a partner." Then he changed the subject. "You're thinking of buying land?"

"No," said Mr. Oliver, "I sailed over in my boat to dispatch a wire. It was much easier than riding a long

way to the nearest office now that the trails are soft."

"They're bad, sure," assented his companion, and they continued to discuss ranching until Mr. Oliver finally rose and said he would walk across to the depot. The boys followed him a few paces behind. Harry addressed his companion with a look of admiration for his father.

"I guess you noticed how dad found out about those fellows without letting the man think he was curious?" he said.

Frank said that he had noticed it and added:

"I wonder what the fellow came up from the South for?"

"That," said Harry significantly, "is a point I expect dad's doing some hard thinking on just now."

They walked into the agent's office and sat down to wait as he told them that he had as yet received no answer to the telegram. The door near which Frank sat stood partly open, and he noticed that the two men were lounging close outside it. He quietly touched Mr. Oliver's arm, indicating them with a glance. The rancher knitted his brows and presently spoke to the agent.

"There are two men who seem to be waiting for you outside," he said.

The agent walked across to the door.

"Back again, Larry!" he said impatiently. "What's the matter now?"

"When's that fish box of mine coming along?" the man inquired.

"I don't know," said the agent. "Next freight, most likely, if it's been delivered to us at the other end."

"Won't you wire up the line about it?"

"No," said the agent. "If you'll put up the stamps I'll wire to the fish store you billed it to."

The man looked indignant. "I tell you it's in the railroad's hands. Do you think I've nothing better to do than hang about this depot every time a freight comes through?" He paused a moment with his eyes on the

ground, then went on: "Anyway, now I'm on the spot I may as well wait for the next one. She should be along in about an hour. Won't you let me in?"

The telegraph instrument began to click just then and the agent turned toward him sharply.

"There's no room. You can wait at the hotel."

"Perhaps the message is about his box," broke in the other man.

Frank glanced around at them. They were dressed like most of the bush choppers in rough working clothes and there was nothing particularly noticeable in their appearance, but he fancied that they had some reason for wishing to get into the office.

"No, sir," said the agent. "They don't wire about the delivery of an empty box on this road. Get out! I want to shut the door."

Frank noticed that one of the loungers had thrust his foot against the post, but the agent, seeming to lose his temper, slammed the door on it. The man withdrew it with an exclamation, and the agent turned toward the instrument which was now clicking rapidly. He tapped an answering signal, and then wrote upon a strip of paper which he handed Mr. Oliver. The latter read the message and handed it to the boys.

"First route unsatisfactory second preferred," it ran. *"Meet me nine to-night Everett if possible."*

Frank was puzzled, but he fancied that Harry understood the message better than he did.

"Thanks," said Mr. Oliver, addressing the agent. "Your two friends outside seemed uncommonly anxious about that box."

"That's a fact," said the agent. "Larry was worrying me about it before it was light. I don't know the fellow who came along with him, but it struck me that he was listening to the instrument as if he understood it, though he couldn't have heard more than the depot call. Of

course," he added thoughtfully, "'most any one who had worked on a railroad would know the code, but I can't figure why they should make so much fuss about a box that's scarcely worth a dollar."

"It's curious," Mr. Oliver answered indifferently. "You might lend me your train schedule."

The agent gave him the company's time bill, which also included the coast steamboat sailings, and Mr. Oliver walked back with the boys to the hotel. There was nobody in the general room when they reached it, and they sat down near the stove.

"Now," he began, "as we have taken you into our confidence and it's probable that you can help, you may as well understand the situation thoroughly. The message was, of course, from Barclay, though it bears a clerk's name, and it means that Porteous has opened the letter you left him. I fancy he'll regret it, but that is by the way. Barclay received the second letter untampered with, and the rest is plain enough. The only question is how I'm to keep the appointment without putting the fellows at the depot on my track."

"You believe they're in league with the smugglers?" Frank inquired.

Mr. Oliver smiled. "It seems very likely. Here's a man who keeps a boat, and, as you have heard, folks wonder how he makes a living by his fishing. If the boat's moderately fast you can imagine how useful he would be to the smugglers by taking messages from place to place and communicating with the schooner. Then we have another man who seems able to read the telegraph turning up and trying to hear Barclay's message."

"But how could they have learned that you expected it?" Frank asked.

"I'm not sure. Porteous may have suspected something and sent a mounted man off to wire one of the gang. Besides, the fellow who has the boat may have been across with her. It wouldn't be hard to surmise

that I would wire from here, though they may have had a man watching the nearest office I could have reached by land on horseback." He paused a moment and looked at the boys gravely. "All this points to the fact that we're up against a big and remarkably well-organized gang."

Frank had no doubt that Mr. Oliver was right, but he asked a question:

"Why did Barclay choose Everett when it's so far from the field of their operations?"

"That's exactly why he fixed on it. There would be less probability of somebody connected with the gang recognizing us, and I've met him there already. The fact that he doesn't mention any particular hotel should have told you that; but what we have to consider is how I'm to get there without these fellows following me. It's important that I should be back at the ranch as soon as possible, and you and Harry must manage to arrive there the first thing to-morrow."

Frank understood the necessity for this. The nights were long, the bush was lonely, and Mr. Oliver's wooden house and barns, which had cost him a good deal of money, would readily burn, while now, when there was only Jake to take care of them, they would be more or less at the smugglers' mercy. Then Harry, who in the meanwhile, had been examining the schedule, looked up.

"I've an idea," he said. "There's a train goes south in the afternoon, and a steamboat which calls at Everett goes up the Sound this evening. Well, suppose we order dinner here and start for Bannington's a little before the cars come in. The steamboat would stop to pick up there if she's signaled, and with this breeze we should get down shortly before she passes."

Mr. Oliver turned to Frank.

"How does that strike you?" he asked.

"The trouble is that the other men would follow us in

their boat," the boy objected. Then a light dawned upon him as he saw the twinkle in Mr. Oliver's eyes. "You mean that's what Harry intended them to do?"

"Exactly!" Harry broke in with a grin. "They raise brainy folks in Boston, and you're getting hold. Those fellows will get after us as soon as they can hoist sail on their boat and we'll give them a run for it. The point is that while they're following us dad will be on the cars."

"But how is he going to elude them?"

"That," Harry admitted sagely, "wants some thinking out."

They made their plans in the next half-hour, and some time after dinner was over walked toward the beach. Nobody seemed to be following them, though they could not be sure of this since the trail wound about through the bush, but when they reached the canoe another boat which they had not noticed on arriving lay moored a few hundred yards away. They were obliged to carry the canoe down some distance over very rough stones, and on reaching the water's edge Mr. Oliver took a quick glance about him.

"I'm afraid one plan's spoiled," he said.

The boys glanced back toward the trail and Frank saw two figures saunter out on to the beach. Harry frowned as he glanced at them.

"You can't slip back into the bush without their seeing you," he warned.

"No," said Mr. Oliver. "Still, I think there's a means of getting over the difficulty. Shove the canoe in. They'll have to carry their boat down, and our boat's lying nearer the head yonder than theirs is."

Frank did not understand how the rancher intended to evade his pursuers and fancied that Harry was not much wiser. They had soon launched the canoe, however, and were paddling off to the sloop, running the mainsail up in

haste. Then the boys set the jib as she drew out from the beach, and Frank noticed that the other men were hoisting sail upon their boat as fast as they could manage it. The sloop, however, was already some distance away from them, and it was not long before she picked up a freshening breeze. Lying well over to it she gathered speed, and close to lee of her Frank saw a low, rocky head, down the face of which straggled stunted pines and underbrush. He fancied that she would be hidden from their pursuers when she had sailed around the end of it, but on glancing back as they approached the corner he saw that the other men had started after them. They were three or four minutes behind, but he had no idea yet how Mr. Oliver meant to elude them. He was still wondering about it when the rancher spoke to him.

"Get hold of the canoe painter," he ordered. "The moment we're around the corner we'll haul her up and you'll put me ashore. You'll have to be smart about it, because you must be back on board before the other boat rounds the head."

Harry had already taken the helm, and the sloop was sailing very fast, with the canoe lurching and splashing over the short seas astern of her. They broke in a broad fringe of foam upon the stony beach thirty or forty yards to lee, and as the boat swept on the bay behind closed in and the seaward face of the cliff opened out ahead. Frank could still see the boat astern, but as he stood in the well with his hands clenched upon a rope he knew that in another moment the rocks would shut her out. Then, sure enough, she suddenly vanished, and shortly afterward he heard Mr. Oliver's voice.

"Haul!" he shouted.

Harry flung loose the mainsheet, but the boat did not quicken her speed immediately, and Frank found it desperately hard to drag up the canoe, though Mr. Oliver had seized the rope behind him. Haste was, however,

necessary, if the rancher was to slip back to the depot unsuspected. At last the canoe ran alongside with a bang and Mr. Oliver dropped on board, while Frank nearly upset her as he followed him. Each of them seized a paddle and the boy had a momentary glimpse of the sloop rolling with her slackened mainsail thrashing to and fro, while Harry struggled to haul the jib to weather. After that he looked ahead and swung his paddle, and as the breeze was blowing on to the beach a few quick strokes drove them in through the splashing surf. She struck the stones violently, for they had no time to be careful, and Mr. Oliver jumped ashore, running into the water to thrust her out. Frank contrived to twist her around, though it taxed all his strength, after which he hazarded a single glance behind him. Mr. Oliver had disappeared among the several masses of fallen rock and clumps of small growth which were scattered about the slope.

So far the plan had succeeded, but Frank had still to reach the sloop, which was a different matter from paddling ashore. There was a fresh breeze ahead of him and a little splashing sea heaved up the canoe's bows and checked her speed. In addition to this, it is a rather difficult thing to keep a canoe on a straight course with a single-ended paddle, which can only be dipped on the one side, and in order to do so one must give the blade a back twist, which retards the craft unless it is skillfully managed. Frank, who had hitherto practiced it only in smooth water, found that the bows would blow around in spite of him. He grew hot and breathless, and though he set his lips and strung up his muscles he made very little progress.

"Paddle!" shouted Harry, who had been watching his maneuvers. "Shove her through it! Can't you get a move on? I can't run in any nearer without getting her ashore."

Frank made another desperate attempt, but a splashing

sea broke about the bows, driving the canoe off her course again, and while he savagely swung the paddle Harry surveyed him contemptuously.

"Culcha!" he jeered. "Guess you loaded that up in Boston, but what you want is sand. Can't you get a bit of a hustle on? You're sure born played-out back East."

Frank felt a little more blood surge into his hot face. This was more than he felt inclined to stand from any Westerner of his own weight, but it was clear that he could not rebuke his reviler fittingly until he reached the sloop and the veins swelled up on his forehead as he furiously plied the paddle. Once more a sea broke about the bows and this time part of it splashed in, while as he tried the back-feather stroke the canoe lurched and began to swing around in spite of his redoubled efforts. Harry spread out one hand resignedly.

"Well," he said, "it's our own fault for letting you into the canoe. The trouble was you couldn't be trusted alone with the sloop either. Pshaw! We've no use for folks of your kind in this country."

This was intolerable, because part of it was true, and Frank felt his heart thumping painfully. But he made a last effort, and panting, straining, taxing every muscle to the utmost, he drove the canoe ahead, and eventually managed to grasp the sloop's lee rail. He could not speak, and as he breathlessly crawled on board Harry snatched the rope from him and made it fast.

"Trim that jibsheet over," he commanded.

Frank obeyed him and when they hauled on the main-sheet the sloop once more gathered speed, while Frank glancing astern saw a strip of slanted sail appear around the corner of the head. Then he glanced ashore, and though he saw no sign of Mr. Oliver the slope to the beach was not remarkably steep and he fancied that the rancher would not have much trouble in ascending it.

CHAPTER XXIV

A FAST RUN

AFTER they had trimmed sail Frank sat still for a while to recover his breath and, if possible, his composure. He felt that it was necessary to demand an explanation from his companion. Though they had once or twice had a difference of opinion, this was the first time that Harry had been insulting, and Frank found it impossible to pass over what he had said. When he felt able to speak clearly he looked his companion in the eyes.

"Now," he began, "I'll admit that you can shoot and sail a boat rather better than I can, but that doesn't entitle you to talk as you did just now."

"I don't know if it matters, but I've a notion that I did shout," Harry answered calmly.

"That only makes it worse," Frank burst out warmly. "You couldn't call it shouting either. I once heard a coyote on the prairie, and it had a much sweeter voice than you have."

To his astonishment, Harry grinned.

"Oh, well," he said, "but won't you get down under the mainboom before you go on? I don't want those fellows astern to see there are only two of us on board the sloop."

Frank did as he suggested, whereupon Harry waved his hand and smiled graciously.

"Now," he added, "you can go ahead."

Frank found it harder than he had expected. His anger was beginning to evaporate and Harry's good humor was embarrassing. Still, he made another effort.

"In the first place," he resumed, "there are just as smart and capable folks in Massachusetts as there are anywhere else."

"That's quite right," assented Harry. "I don't see why there shouldn't be, but I suppose you're not through yet. You want to call me down?"

"When you say things of that kind — you —" Frank stammered, and stopped when he observed his companion still smiling.

"Sure!" said Harry, "I ought to be pounded with the boathook if I'd meant them."

Frank gazed at him in bewilderment. "You didn't mean them?"

"No," said Harry. "Not a word of it."

"Then why did you say them?"

"Well," replied his friend, "that's a reasonable question. Now it was mighty important that you should get alongside before our friends astern came into sight, and though you weren't making very much progress it seemed to me you were doing all you knew."

"I was," Frank assured him.

"Still, I had an idea that if I could make you jumping mad you might do a little more. It's hard to tell what you're capable of until you're real savage, and I thought I'd whip you up a bit where you were most likely to feel it."

Frank's indignation vanished, and he changed the subject with a laugh.

"Do you think those fellows suspected anything?" he asked.

"No," said Harry. "They were too busy getting sail on her to notice exactly how far ahead we were when we ran out of the bay, and it will probably only strike them that they're not quite so far astern as they expected. All we have to do now is to lead them along toward Bannington's. I'd rather keep them sailing than have them prowling round the depot asking questions and,

perhaps, sending telegrams, and I've a notion we can leave them when we like. She's drawing away from them now and we've only a small jib on her."

His surmise proved correct, for an hour later the other boat had diminished to a dusky patch of sail far astern. Dusk soon commenced to fall and the wind seemed to be freshening, but as they swept around a rocky point Harry changed his course and told Frank to make a stout rope fast to the bucket and pitch it over.

"It will hold her back and let the other fellows come up," he said with a grin. "They'll probably figure their boat's faster in any weight of wind, and we don't want to run out of sight of them."

It grew dark and for a while the sky was barred with heavy clouds until the moon broke out, when they saw the pursuing craft sweeping up close astern in the midst of a blaze of silvery radiance. She had now, however, a mass of canvas swung out on either side of her, and Frank wondered what sail she was carrying.

"They've boomed out a jib as a spinnaker," Harry explained. "I don't see why we shouldn't do the same, particularly as it will make them keener on following us to Bannington's. One of them means to go south with the steamer if dad gets on to her. Now we'll heave in that bucket, and when it's done they'll open their eyes."

It was not easy to haul in the bucket. Indeed, once or twice it was nearly torn away from them, but at length they accomplished the task.

"It's awkward running a boat with a spinnaker unless you have a crew," remarked Harry with a somewhat puzzled look. "Still, I feel we ought to give those fellows a run for their trouble and I can't get clear of them with only the mainsail drawing. A jib set in the ordinary way is no use when you're before the wind."

The other boat had drawn almost level with them and came surging along some forty yards away, rising and falling, with the foam piled up about her bows; and a

great spread of canvas that swung up and down as she rolled on either side.

"Hello!" shouted Harry. "Where are you going?"

"North," was the laconic answer.

Harry chuckled as he turned to Frank. "Well, as dad will be in Everett by this time, I don't see why they shouldn't come along with us as far as they like, but we'll let them draw ahead before we get up the spinnaker. I'd rather they didn't notice I had to set it alone."

The other boat forged past them, and she was growing dim ahead when Harry pulled out a bundle of canvas from beneath the side deck.

"It's an extra big jib we carry in light winds, but it makes a good spinnaker," he said. "You'll have to keep her straight before the wind, because it's a mighty awkward thing to set."

Frank took the helm and watched his companion as he shook the big sail out all over the boat, after which he led a rope fastened to one corner of it through a block at the end of a long spar that lay along the deck. He thrust this out over her side and made its inner end fast to the foot of the mast.

"A spinnaker boom always goes forward of the shrouds and you lead the guy aft outside them," he said. "Get hold of it and stick fast. It's easy so far, but in a minute the circus will begin. You want two pairs of hands to set a spinnaker in a breeze of wind."

Frank glanced at the short seas which surged by, glittering in the moonlight flecked with wisps of snowy froth, and it struck him by the way the boat swung over them with the foam boiling about her that she was carrying sufficient canvas in her mainsail. Then Harry, calling to him to mind his steering, hauled on a halliard and a mass of thrashing canvas rose up the mast. It blew out like a half-filled balloon, lifting up the boom, which was run out on the opposite side to the mainsail, and seemed bent

on soaring skyward over the masthead. After that the boom swung forward with a crash, the mast strained and rattled, and Frank feared that the great loose sail would tear it out of the boat. He saw Harry lifted off his feet and flung upon the deck, after which the forward part of the boat was swept by flying ropes and billowy folds of canvas, among which his companion seemed to be futilely crawling to and fro. Presently his voice reached Frank hoarse and breathless.

"Haul on the guy!" he cried. "She'll pitch me over or whip the mast out if this goes on."

Frank dragged at the rope with all his might, but he could not get an inch of it in, and he dared not take his right hand off the tiller for fear of bringing the big mainboom over upon the spinnaker, which would probably have caused a catastrophe. Indeed, he fancied that one was inevitable already, since it seemed impossible that Harry could control the big loose sail which was now wildly hurling itself aloft.

"I can't move it!" he shouted.

Harry came aft with a jump and grasped the guy.

"Now," he said, "together! Get both hands upon it. Hold the tiller with your elbow."

For the next half minute there was a furious struggle, and as the boom went up again Frank felt that they were beaten. His companion, however, hung on desperately, panting hard, and by degrees the boom swung down and back across the boat and the sail flattened out.

"Make fast!" cried Harry breathlessly. "I can manage the sheet."

He floundered forward to the foot of the mast, and when he came back the spinnaker was drawing steadily and the sloop had changed her mode of progress. She no longer rolled viciously or screwed up to windward as she lifted on a sea, but swayed from side to side with a smooth and easy swing, and Frank could steer her with a touch upon the tiller. In spite of that, steering was

ticklish work, for the mainboom and the spinnaker boom went up and came down until they raked the glittering brine alternately, and Frank realized that it would be singularly easy to bring one crashing over upon the other. There was no doubt that the boat was sailing very fast, and he hazarded one swift glance over his shoulder at the canoe. She was surging along astern, hove up with her forward half out of the water, and a seething mass of foam hiding the rest of her. Harry, however, glanced forward somewhat anxiously.

"That boom's lifting too much," he said. "One of us ought to sit on it. Do you feel able to steer her?"

Frank said that he believed he could manage it.

"Well," said Harry, "if you jibe either sail across you'll either pitch me in or break my leg, even if you don't roll the boat over. Sing out the moment you feel her getting too hard upon the helm."

Scrambling forward, he crawled out along the spinnaker boom, to which he clung precariously, lifted up high one moment and the next swung down until his feet were just above the foam. Sometimes they splashed in, and Frank, bracing himself until every nerve was strung up, felt horribly uneasy. In spite of that, the wild rush through the glittering water which boiled about the boat was wonderfully exhilarating. She seemed a mass of straining sail which swayed in the moonlight above an insignificant strip of hull half buried in snowy foam. Over her black mainsail peak dim wisps of clouds went streaming by, and from all around there was a tumult of stirring sound — the clamor at the bows, the swish of water as the canoe came charging up to her, and the splash of tumbling seas. Everything ahead, however, was hidden by the sail, and he was wondering where the other boat was when Harry called to him.

"Slack the guy a foot or two and let her come up a little. Don't let it get the run of you or you'll pitch me in."

Frank was very cautious as he eased the rope out around a cleat, after which, when the spinnaker boom had drawn forward, he found that he could luff the boat. When she had swerved from her course a trifle he could see the other boat close ahead, and it gave him some idea how fast both craft were traveling. She seemed nothing but sail. Indeed, except for the torn-up track of foam that marked her passage, she looked much less like a boat than some wonderful phantom thing flying at an astonishing speed across the sea. Swiftly as she sped, however, there was no doubt that the sloop was creeping up on her, and Frank felt himself quivering all through as the distance between them lessened yard by yard. Then suddenly the contour of her canvas changed and she swung around from leeward across the sloop's bows. Frank's heart gave a sudden leap as he wondered what he must do and his nerve almost deserted him, until Harry called again.

"More guy!" he sang out. "They're trying to luff us. We must keep their weather."

Although fearful that it might overpower him, Frank slacked the guy out inch by inch, and as the sloop came up a little farther he saw the whole of the other boat again. The sloop's bowsprit was level with her quarter. She was scarcely a dozen yards away, leaping, plunging, swaying through a flung-up mass of foam, but they were steadily drawing up with her, and the boy could have shouted in the fierce excitement of the moment. Two or three minutes later they were clear ahead. He could no longer see the other boat, and he dared not risk a glance back at her. Indeed, it was a relief to him when Harry came scrambling aft.

"We'll get that guy in again," he said. "Unless something gives out, those folks won't catch us up."

They had a desperate struggle with the guy, but Harry laughed gayly when they had made it fast.

"They'll follow us on to Bannington's, sure," he said.

"We should be there in half an hour, and I don't mind allowing that I'll be glad to get some of this sail off her."

After a while a black bank of cloud spread across the moon, and Frank wondered anxiously how much of the half hour had gone. He had now only the pull on the tiller to guide him as they drove on furiously, and the strain of concentrating all his faculties on his task was beginning to tell on his strength. Once or twice he imagined that he came perilously near to bringing the mainboom over, and he would have called Harry to the helm if he had felt certain that he could cling to the slender lurching spar as well as his comrade could. He was getting nervous, and the seething rush of water past the boat was becoming bewildering.

At length, however, he made out a dark and hazy mass over the edge of the mainsail, which he supposed was land, and in another few minutes a blinking light appeared. He called to Harry, who merely twisted himself around on the boom with the object of looking out beneath the sail and then told him to keep her heading as she was. After that the land rose rapidly, growing blacker, and a second light appeared. This was closer to them and Frank, thinking he saw it move, noticed a green blink beneath it.

Presently both lights disappeared behind the sail, and some minutes later Frank almost let go the tiller as the deep blast of a steamer's whistle rang out close ahead. On the instant Harry swung himself down from the boom.

"Let go your guy!" he shouted. "Down helm; get the mainsheet in!"

Frank could never clearly remember all that followed in the next two or three minutes during which he was desperately busy. He let the spinnaker guy run, and the big sail which heaved up the spar beneath it swung wildly forward. Then he shoved down his helm, and the main-

boom slashed furiously as the boat came up toward the wind. The sheet blocks seemed to be banging everywhere about him as he hauled at the rope, and he could hear nothing but the savage thrashing of loosened canvas. Harry was struggling forward with a mass of billowing sail that threatened to sweep him off the narrow deck, while flying ropes whipped about him. Presently, out of the din, there rose another sonorous blast of the steamer's whistle.

The next moment Frank saw her, heading, it seemed, straight for them, blazing with tiers of lights, and in almost nerveless haste he pulled up his tiller. The bolt fell off, he saw Harry flung down with the spinnaker rolling about him, and he scarcely dared to breathe as the rows of lights ahead lengthened and the black wedge of the steamer's bows faded from his sight. It was now her side he was gazing at, and it was evident that she was swinging around. In less than another minute she had forged past them, and leaving the helm he scrambled forward to aid his companion. For a moment they had a brief struggle with flying ropes and billowing sail, and then they clambered back into the well, where Frank sat down with a gasp of fervent satisfaction.

"Well," he panted, "I'm glad that's over, and you had better take the helm. I've had enough."

Harry glanced toward the steamer, which was growing less distinct.

"A close call!" he remarked. "It looked as if she was going slap over us. I couldn't see her sooner because of the sail. She's running into Bannington's."

They heard her whistle a little later, but they were then close in with a shadowy point of land, and looking back Frank made out a faint blur on the water far behind them which he knew must be the other boat. When he pointed it out Harry laughed.

"They can't see us against the land, but I've an idea they'll be in soon enough to learn the steamer didn't

pick one of us up," he said. "That will start them wondering why we drove her so hard and where we've gone. Now you had better get the stove lighted and the supper on."

CHAPTER XXV

THE UNITED STATES MAIL

THE boys reached the ranch the next morning, and Mr. Oliver, who followed by a different route a couple of days later, seemed satisfied with the result of his journey.

"If the dope men leave us alone for the next three weeks we're not likely to be troubled with them afterward," he said. "Barclay expects very shortly to be ready for what he calls his coup."

"I suppose he didn't mention exactly when he would bring it off?" Harry remarked.

"No," said Mr. Oliver with a laugh. "Barclay usually waits until he's certain before he moves, and he's not addicted to spoiling things by haste. In the meanwhile you may as well keep your eyes sharply open."

"Won't it be awkward to communicate with him if you have to go to Bannington's every time you mail a letter?" Frank asked.

"That's a point which naturally occurred to me," Mr. Oliver answered. "There are, however, reasons for believing that Barclay will be able to get over the difficulty."

He said nothing further on the subject, but it cropped up again one evening when Mr. Webster arrived at the ranch in time for supper. He told them that he had finished the bridge he had gone away to build, and when they sat about the stove after the meal was over he turned to Mr. Oliver.

"Have you heard that Porteous has been fired out

of the store and they've got a man down from Tacoma?" he asked.

"No," replied Mr. Oliver indifferently.

"Anyway, you don't seem much astonished."

Mr. Oliver smiled at this. "I can't say I am. What was the trouble?"

"It's generally believed Porteous was tampering with the mails, and that brings up another thing I want to mention. I'm puzzled about it as well as pleased."

Harry, unobserved by Mr. Webster, grinned at Frank, looking solemn again as his father caught his eye.

"Well?" said the latter politely.

"It's just this," said Mr. Webster. "When I came through the settlement this morning the man who fills Porteous's place gave me a letter. It requested me to send in a formal application if I was open to have my place made a postoffice and carry the mails for this and the Carthew district. They don't pay one very much, but it only means a journey once a week."

"Then what are you puzzled at?"

"Well," said Mr. Webster, his eyes bent thoughtfully on the fire, "you and the Carthew folks tried to have a mail carrier appointed some time ago, and you heard that the authorities were considering your representations. I guess that's about all they did. They're great on considering, and as a rule they don't get much further. It strikes me as curious that they should give you the postoffice now, considering that they wouldn't do it when you worried them for it. The next point is that although I applied the other time I don't know anybody in office or any political boss who would speak for me."

Frank noticed the smile broaden on Harry's face, but Mr. Webster was intently watching Mr. Oliver, who answered carelessly.

"It's a poor job, one that only a local man could undertake, and I don't know any one else who wants it," he said. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Send in the application right away. That's partly what brought me over. I'll have to get you and two of the boys at Carthew to vouch for me."

"There'll be no trouble about that," Mr. Oliver assured him, after which they changed the conversation. Before Mr. Webster went away he asked the boys to spend a day or two with him and do some hunting.

Mr. Oliver let them go at the end of the week, but he said that they had better meet Mr. Webster at the settlement where Miss Oliver wanted them to leave an order for some groceries, and that if any letters had arrived for him one of them must bring them across to the ranch. They reached the settlement Saturday evening, soon after the weekly mail had come in. When they had finished their supper at the store Mr. Webster bundled his mails promiscuously into a flour bag, which he fastened upon his shoulders with a couple of straps.

"There seems to be quite a lot of letters," remarked Harry as he lifted up the bag.

Mr. Webster frowned. "Letters!" he growled. "Most of the blamed stuff's groceries. It strikes me I'm going to earn my dollars. The boys who run short of sugar or yeast powder or any truck of that kind expect me to pack it out. Give the thing a heave up. There's the corner of a meat can working into my ribs."

They set out shortly afterward, following a very bad trail driven like a tunnel through the bush, and when they had gone a mile or two Mr. Webster lighted a lantern which he gave to Frank.

"Hold it up and look about," he said. "It's somewhere round here Jardine has his letter box nailed up on a tree."

Frank presently discovered an empty powder keg fixed to a big fir, and Mr. Webster, wriggling out of the straps, dropped the bag with a thud. As it happened, it descended in a patch of mud.

"Hold the light so I can see to sort this truck," he

said, and plunged his hand into the bag. It was white when he brought it out.

"Something's got adrift," he commented. "They never can tie a package right in the store."

With some difficulty he at last found the letters, though this necessitated his spreading out most of the rest and the groceries on the wet soil. Then he deposited those that belonged to Jardine in the keg and went on again.

Dense darkness filled the narrow rift in the bush and the feeble rays of the lantern were more bewildering than useful, but they covered another two miles before they stopped at a second keg, when Webster discovered that a couple of letters he fished out were stuck together with half-melted sugar. He tore them apart and rubbed them clean upon his trousers, smearing out the address as he did so.

"It's lucky I looked at them first, because I couldn't tell whose they are now," he said. "Anyway, as I guess the stuff hasn't had time to get inside, Steve will know they're his when he opens them." He raised the bag a little and examined it. "This thing's surely wet."

"I expect it is," said Harry. "The last time you stopped you dumped it in the mud. Didn't they give you some sugar for this place at the store?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Webster. "I was forgetting it. Hold the lantern lower, Frank, while I look for it."

He pulled the flour bag wider open and presently produced a big paper package which seemed to have lost its shape.

"Half the stuff's run out," he added. "That's what has been mussing up the mail. Pitch this truck out and we'll skip the rest of the sugar out of the bottom of the bag."

It took them some time to deposit the various bundles of letters and packets among the wineberry bushes beside the trail, after which Mr. Webster shook a pound or two of loose wet sugar into the opened package. It appeared

to be mixed with flour and other substances, and Harry smiled as he glanced at it.

"It's off its color," he remarked.

"That," said Mr. Webster, "will serve Steve right and save me trouble. The next time he wants sugar he'll walk into the settlement and pack it out himself. When you've put that truck back the mail will go ahead."

They threw the things back into the bag, but while they were engaged in this task Harry held up a bundle of letters to the light and separated two of them from the rest.

"These are dad's," he mused. "It strikes me they'd be safer in my pocket."

They saw no more powder kegs, but by and by they stopped at a ranch where they delivered a newspaper and a pound of coffee, and then plodded on in thick darkness which was only intensified by the patch of uncertain radiance that flickered upon the trail a yard or two in front of them. Even this failed them presently when Frank fell and dropped the lantern. It went out, and neither he nor Harry, who struck a match, could open it.

"I'm afraid I've bent the catch," said Frank.

"It's not going to matter much," Mr. Webster answered. "I guess we can fix the thing when we reach my place, and there isn't another ranch until we come to it."

They trudged along in silence for another hour. The trail seemed darker than ever, and it was oppressively still. Even the great trunks a few yards away were invisible, and once or twice Frank walked into the bushes that clustered among them. At last, however, the sound of running water came out of the gloom and grew louder until the boy fancied that there must be a rapid creek somewhere below them. Neither he nor Harry had been that way before. As they expected to get some shooting, he was carrying the double gun, which

was beginning to feel heavy, while Harry had brought a rifle. When the roar of water had grown so loud that they could scarcely hear each other's footsteps, Mr. Webster stopped.

"There's an awkward place close ahead, and you had better let me go in front," he warned. "Keep a few yards behind and close to the bank on your left side. The trail goes down a gulch, and there's a steep drop to the creek."

He moved on until the boys could just see his black and shadowy figure. The hollow beneath them was filled with impenetrable gloom, and they went down cautiously, trying to follow him and feeling with their feet for the edge of the bank on one hand. They had gone some little way when Mr. Webster seemed to stagger and suddenly disappear. Then there was a crash amidst the underbrush, a sound which might have been made by a heavy body rolling down a slope, and a hoarse cry which was almost drowned by the clamor of the creek.

The boys stopped abruptly, uncertain what to do. Mr. Webster had evidently fallen down the declivity, but they could not tell where he was in the darkness, or if it was possible to reach him. Frank fancied that if he once moved out from the bank he would probably step over a ledge and plunge down into the creek, which, it was evident, would be of no service to Mr. Webster. By and by he was sincerely glad to hear a sound below him which seemed to indicate that the man was endeavoring to clamber up again. On recalling the incident afterward, he decided that they had stood waiting about a quarter of a minute.

"We must get down somehow," he said to Harry.

His companion did not answer, but gripped his arm warningly. Then to Frank's astonishment another sound rose up somewhere in front of them and a voice followed it.

"Is that you, Webster?" it asked.

"Sure!" was the answer. "I've pitched right down the gulch."

Frank would have scrambled forward, but Harry held him back.

"Hold on!" he said softly. "He doesn't seem hurt."

A crackling and snapping below them suggested that somebody was cautiously scrambling through the undergrowth toward Mr. Webster, while the latter was evidently crawling up the ascent. Frank wondered why Harry had restrained him until a blaze of light suddenly broke out. It showed a very steep bank with clumps of brush scattered about it dropping to a foaming creek, Mr. Webster holding on by the stem of a stunted pine, with the flour bag lying some distance higher up, and another figure moving toward him. A third man stood on the brink of the declivity holding a blazing pineknot. Where the boys stood, however, there was deep shadow.

Mr. Webster, so far as Frank could make out, was gazing at the man nearest him in astonishment.

"Well," he said sharply, "what do you want?"

"The mail," answered the other. "Stop right where you are!"

Then the meaning of the situation dawned on Frank. At that moment he saw Mr. Webster scramble forward to intercept the man who was making for the bag. The latter, however, was nearer it, and he had crept almost up to it while Mr. Webster was still several yards away. Without a moment's hesitation, Frank sprang out into the flickering light.

"Keep back!" he shouted. "Don't touch that bag!"

The radiance fell upon the barrel of his gun, and the next moment Harry emerged from the gloom with his rifle thrust forward. They decided afterward that the strangers could only have seen two indistinct figures with weapons in their hands and that there was nothing to indicate that they were not grown men.

"Hold him up!" shouted Mr. Webster, scrambling forward furiously as if to seize the man.

The latter stooped swiftly and made a grab at the bag as Frank pitched up his gun, though he kept the muzzle of it turned a little from the bent figure, but just then Harry's rifle flashed behind him and there was sudden darkness as the light fell into a thicket. Confused sounds followed the detonation, but it became evident to Frank, now quivering with excitement, that three separate persons were smashing through scrubby undergrowth as fast as they could manage. Then one of them stopped while the rest went on.

"Have you got the bag?" cried Harry.

"It's in my hand," said Mr. Webster.

They heard him floundering toward them, while the other sounds grew fainter, until he emerged from the gloom close beside Frank and threw the bag at his feet.

"Give me your gun," he said shortly. "Stop where you are!"

He disappeared again, but in another moment they saw him raking in a clump of brush from which a pale light still flickered, after which he came back toward them with something blazing feebly in his hand.

"Bring the bag, and be careful how you walk," he said.

When they joined him he was stooping over a short strip of wire stretched across the trail about a foot above the ground, holding the pineknot so that the light fell upon it.

"I guess that's the reason I fell down," he said. "You didn't touch that fellow, Harry."

"I didn't mean to," was the answer. "I wanted to scare him off, and I was mighty thankful when I saw I'd done it."

"Well," said Mr. Webster, "I expect that was wiser. It would have made things worse for your father if you'd

plugged him. Anyway, they've cleared and we may as well get on."

"Aren't you hurt?" Frank inquired.

"There's a nasty rip on my leg and my arm feels mighty sore, but that's all the damage. Seems to me I haven't much to complain of, considering how far I fell."

He flung the pineknot down into the ravine as he turned away, and they had crossed the creek and were ascending the other side before one of them spoke again.

"Did you recognize either of the men?" Harry inquired.

"No," said Mr. Webster. "On the whole I don't know that I'd want to do it, though I'm kind of sorry I didn't get my hands upon the nearest fellow. It was those two letters for your father he was after."

"Yes," said Harry gravely, "you're right in that."

The trail got narrower presently and when the boys fell a little behind Harry laid a hand on Frank's arm.

"I'm not sure that dad and Barclay would have had Webster made mail carrier if they had expected this," he whispered. "There's no doubt the dope men are growing bolder."

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. BARCLAY LAYS HIS PLANS

IT appeared that one of the letters which Harry had secured was from Mr. Barclay, and shortly after the boys got back to the ranch Mr. Oliver sent them off to Bannington's with the sloop. Mr. Barclay, he said, was expected down by the next steamer and they must be there in time to take him off. It proved to be an uneventful trip and they returned to the cove with their passenger just as a gloomy day was dying out. Mr. Oliver was shut up with his guest for an hour after supper that night, but at length he called the boys into his room, where Mr. Barclay lay in a big chair with a cigar in his hand. He looked up with a smile when they came in.

"No doubt you'll be pleased to hear that we expect to round up your dope-running friends before the week is out," he said. "Anyway, I fancy it was a relief to my host."

"There's no doubt on that point," Mr. Oliver assured him. "I don't mind admitting that the suspense and the uncertainty as to what they might do were worrying me rather badly."

Frank was surprised to hear it, for the rancher had certainly shown no sign of uneasiness.

"You mean you're going to break up the gang once for all and corral the whole of them?" he asked.

"Something like that," answered Mr. Barclay lazily. "If there's no hitch in the proceedings, I don't expect

many of them will be left at large when our traps are sprung, though the affair will have to be managed with a good deal of caution."

Harry smiled. "There oughtn't to be any hitch. You have been a mighty long while fixing up the thing."

"That remark," said Mr. Barclay, "is to some extent justified. Over in Europe they say 'slow and sure,' though I don't suppose it's a maxim that's likely to appeal to young America. We'll paraphrase it into this form: 'Don't move until you know exactly what you mean to do and how you're going to set about it, and then get at it like a battering ram.'"

"A battering ram must have been a clumsy, old-time contrivance," Harry objected.

"There are reasons for believing it could strike very hard," said his father with a smile.

"It would naturally take a long while to work the thing out," Frank broke in, addressing Mr. Barclay.

"It did," the little, stout man assented. "We had to get hold of a clue here, and another there, and follow them up as far as possible without giving anybody the least idea what we were after. It might have been more difficult if one hadn't been purposely placed in our hands a week ago."

"Somebody has been giving the gang away?" asked Frank.

"That doesn't quite describe it," Mr. Barclay answered. "To be precise, somebody has sold them. It appears that one man a little smarter than the rest discovered that the gang was being watched. That scared him, and, as it happened, he'd had a difference of opinion with the bosses about the share he claimed to be entitled to. He didn't point his suspicions out to them, but when, as he said, they couldn't be induced to do the square thing he came along to one of my subordinates, who sent him to me. I'm not sure that I'd have got much information out of him then if I hadn't been able to

convince him that he and his partners were already more or less in my hands."

Frank was impressed by what he had heard. Indeed, he was conscious that he was half afraid of the man who sprawled lazily in his chair smiling at him. He appeared so easy-going and he had bantered Harry so good-humoredly, but all the time he had been following up the smugglers' trail with a deadly unwavering patience and a keenness which missed the significance of no clue, however small. Now when at last the time for action had come the boy felt that he would strike in the swiftest and most effective manner.

"If there's any small part you can give us—" he said hesitatingly.

"There is," said Mr. Barclay, to the delight of Frank and his companion. "It appears that they intend to land a parcel of dope and some Chinamen at a place down the Straits of Fuca. It will be done at night—the moon will be only in her first quarter next week—and the schooner will stand out to the westward, keeping clear of the traffic to wait for the next evening before going on to the place where she's to make another call. The men and the dope will be seized soon after they're put ashore without anybody on board the vessel being the wiser if our plans work out right, but it's important that we should know as soon as possible if anything has gone wrong and it will be your business to bring me on a message. We'll have a small steamer and a posse hidden ready at this end, and when the schooner runs in two nights later she'll fall into our hands with the rest of the gang, who'll be waiting for what she brings."

Frank looked at Mr. Oliver, who nodded his consent.

"Yes," he said, "I've promised to let you go, though in this case you'll have to take Jake along."

Then Mr. Barclay spread out a chart upon the table and pointed first to an inlet which appeared to lie at some distance from any settlement.

"You'll run in here in the dark and lie close in with the beach until you're hailed by a mounted messenger, which will probably be early on the following morning. When he has given you his message you must manage to deliver it to me here" — he laid his finger on another spot on the chart — "at the latest by the second evening following. That's important, as it's impossible for me to get the news by mail or wire."

He gave them some further instructions, and half an hour had slipped by before he seemed satisfied that they knew exactly what they were to do; then he nodded.

"I think you've got it right," he said. "The great thing is not to be seen if you can help it, and if it's possible you must only run in at either place in the dark."

The boys spent the next two days in a state of eager anticipation, which, however, became much less marked when one lowering afternoon after a long, cold sail they beat the sloop out to the westward down the Straits of Fuca. They had kept watch alternately with Jake during the previous night, throughout most of which it had rained hard, and now Frank, who admitted to himself that he had had enough sailing for a while, was feeling rather limp and weary. He sat beneath the coaming, as far as he could get out of the bitter wind. When at last he raised his head to look about him, he saw nothing very cheerful in the prospect before him.

The light was dim, the low gray sky to windward looked hard and threatening, and a long gray blur which he supposed to be land rose up indistinctly over the port hand. Ahead dingy, formless slopes of water heaved themselves up slowly one after another in dreary succession. They were ridged and wrinkled here and there, and now and then a little wisp of white appeared on one of them, for the long swell of the Pacific was working in. The breeze was very moderate as yet, and each time the sloop sluggishly swung up her bows and lurched

over one of the undulations her mainboom jerked and lifted amidst a harsh clatter of blocks, while the water inside her went swishing to and fro. The noise presently aroused Jake, who was sitting silently at the helm.

"One of you had better get her pumped out," he said. "You haven't done it since we started, and you won't find it easy by and by."

"It doesn't look nice up yonder," said Harry, glancing windward.

"It's either blowing hard in the Pacific or going to do it, and we'll get it presently. I'd be better pleased if we were nearer that inlet. It's eight or nine miles off, and the wind's dead ahead."

"The dope men would rather have a black, wild night, wouldn't they?" suggested Frank.

"They're going to be gratified," Harry answered significantly.

Frank, glad to do something to warm himself, set to work at the little rotary pump, and a stream of water splashed and spread about the deck, which slanted and straightened irregularly. He was still busy when Jake called to him.

"You can let up and get that jib off her. Strip it right off the stay. We're not going to have any use for a sail of that kind. Get out the small one, Harry."

"There's no wind to speak of yet," Harry protested.

"Well," said Jake grimly, "you'll have plenty before you're through."

Harry dragged up the small sail, and when Frank had lowered the larger one they proceeded to strip it off the stay. It took them some little time, but Frank, glancing at the slowly heaving, leaden water, fancied that there was no need for haste until as he and his companion bundled the canvas off the deck Jake called to them.

"Up with that jib!" he ordered. "Get a hustle!"

They had the halliard in their hands, and the sail was half set, when it blew out suddenly and there was a sharp

creaking. The sloop slanted over wildly and a curious humming, rippling sound broke out to windward. Glancing around a moment Frank saw that the swell was growing white, and a rush of cold wind nearly whipped his cap away. Then jamming his feet against a ledge with the deck sloping away beneath him he struggled furiously to hoist the jib, while disjointed cries reached him from the helmsman.

"Heave!" Jake roared. "I can do nothing with her until you have it set!"

They got the sail up somehow, though by the time they had finished the sloop's lee rail was in the sea, and then flung themselves upon the mainsail. They were breathless with the effort before they had tied two reefs in it, and Frank wondered at the change in their surroundings when at length he sat down in the well.

The sea, which had run in long and almost smooth undulations before they began to reef, now splashed and seethed about the boat, and each big slope of water was seamed with innumerable smaller ridges. Bitter spray was flying thick in the air, water already sluiced about the deck, and it was disconcerting to recollect that they were still eight miles from the inlet. This would not have mattered so much had it not lain dead to windward, which meant that they must fight for every yard they made.

There was shelter to lee of them. They could put up the helm and run, but though they were wet through in a few minutes they braced themselves for the struggle, while the savage blast screamed about them and the ominous sound Frank had noticed — the splash of waves that curled and broke — came more loudly out of the gathering gloom ahead. Though his physical nature shrank from the task before him Frank would not have chosen to go back. It was a big thing they were taking a hand in, the climax which all their previous adventures had led up to, and he recognized that they must see it through at any cost.

At last he was playing a man's part, acting in close coöperation with the Government of his country, and Mr. Barclay, who had elaborated the scheme with infinite patience and foresight, counted upon him and his comrade. That they should fail him now was out of the question, but Frank was glad that Jake sat at the tiller. Harry was quick and daring, but he was young, and in this fight there was urgent need for the instinctive skill which comes from long experience. The helmsman's stolidness was more reassuring. He gazed up to windward, gripping the tiller, with the spray upon his rugged face, ready for whatever action might be necessary. Loud talking and an assertive manner were of no service here; what was wanted was raw human valor and steadfast nerve. It was fortunate that Jake, who was tranquil and good-humored, possessed both.

Darkness shut down on them suddenly as they thrashed her out to westward full and by, lurching with flooded decks over the charging seas. Their whitened tops broke over her, her canvas ran water, and every other minute she plunged into a comber with buried bows. The combers, growing rapidly higher, broke more angrily, and her progress changed into a series of jerks and plunges, which at times threatened to shake the spars out of her. Frank could see the black mainsail peak above him swinging madly up and down, and it seemed at times that half her length was out of the water, which was not improbably the case, for the foam upon her hove-up deck poured aft in cascades over the low coaming and splashed about their feet. By and by, for she was shallow-bodied like most centerboard craft, it began to gather in a pool which washed to and fro across the floorings in her lee bilge, and at a shout from Jake he started the pump. It needed no priming, for as soon as he unscrewed the covering plate the sea ran down, and there was now nothing to show what water it flung out, because half the lee deck

was buried in a rush of gurgling foam and the combers' tops broke continuously over the bows.

Still, the work roused and warmed him, and he toiled on, battered and almost blinded by flying brine, while he wondered how long the boat would stand the pressure of her largely reduced sail. He did not think they could tie another reef in, because it seemed certain that something must burst or break the moment a rope was started. Besides, even had it been possible, reefing was out of the question. Their harbor lay to weather, and a boat will not sail to windward in a vicious breeze unless she is driven at a speed which is greater than the resistance of the opposing seas.

They thrashed her out for two anxious hours, since it appeared doubtful that she would come round and a failure to stay her would be perilous in the extreme, but at last Jake called to the boys.

"We've got to do it somehow," he said. "Stand by your lee jibsheet and tail on to the mainsheet the moment you let it run. Hold on till I tell you. We'll wait for a smooth."

A smooth, as it is termed by courtesy, is the interval that now and then follows the onslaught of several unusually heavy seas, and at length as the boat swung up with a little less water upon her deck Jake seemed satisfied.

"Now! Helm's a-lee!" he shouted.

They let the jib fly, and jumping for the mainsheet hauled with all their might, while Jake helped them with one hand as the boat came up to the wind. Then as a comber fell upon her they sprang back to the jibsheet and hauled upon it, while the spray flew all over them. It struck Frank that if the boat did not come round there would very speedily be an end of her. While he watched, holding his breath, the bows swung around a little farther, and working in frantic haste they let the sheet fly and made fast the opposite one, which was now to lee. She

forged ahead on the other tack — and the most imminent peril was past.

It was two hours later when they raised the land again, and though one or the other of them had pumped continuously the water was splashing high about their feet. Jake had, however, made a good shot of it, for he recognized a ridge of higher ground marked upon the chart, and they drove in toward it, battered, swept, and streaming. Frank felt strangely limp when at length they ran into smoother water, and Jake made one significant remark.

“We’re through,” he said, “but if we’d had to make another tack it would have finished her.”

The black land grew higher until they could make out masses of shadowy pines, and eventually dropping the jib and peak they ran her in behind a point with very thankful hearts and let go the anchor. Half of their task was finished, and they could take their ease until morning broke.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DERELICT

THE wind freshened after they reached shelter and it blew very hard. For a time Frank found sleep impossible, though he was glad to lie snug in the warm cabin with the lamp burning above him and the stove snapping cheerfully. The sloop lurched and rocked, drawing her chain tight now and then with a bang, while a muffled uproar went on outside her. Frank could distinguish the angry splash of water upon her bows and the drumming and rapping of loose ropes against the mast, though these sounds were partly drowned by the furious clamor of the ground sea beyond the point and a great deep-toned roaring made, he supposed, by long ranks of thrashing trees. Once or twice, when Jake, who crawled out to see if the anchor was holding, left the slide open, the sound filled the cabin with tremendous pulsating harmonies.

Besides this, the boy's face smarted after the lashing of icy spray, and he wondered whether Mr. Barclay's plans were working out successfully and what fresh adventures awaited Harry and himself on the morrow, all of which was sufficient to keep him in a state of restless expectation. He envied his companion who presently went to sleep, but it was toward morning when at last his own eyelids closed and he got a few snatches of fitful slumber broken by fantastic dreams. He was awakened by a chill upon his face, and looking around saw that Jake had gone out again into the well. The roar of the wind did not seem so overwhelming as it had been, though there was no doubt that it was still blowing hard. By and by Jake called out.

"You'd better get up," he said. "I've a notion that there's somebody hailing us."

Frank crawled out shivering, with Harry grumbling half asleep behind him, and when he stood in the well found he could see a hazy loom of trees across the little white waves that came splashing toward the boat. They made a sharp, rippling sound, pitched in a different tone from the din that rose all around. The latter swelled and sank, and he was slightly surprised when he was able to hear what seemed to be a faint shout. It rose again more clearly, and there was no longer any doubt that somebody on the beach was hailing them.

"Can we get ashore?" he asked.

"You'll have to try," said Jake. "The man's to windward of us, and it will be a stiff paddle, but if you can't manage it you'll blow across to the beach on the other side of the inlet safe enough and he may be able to get round to you. Anyway, I don't want to leave the sloop. She'd have picked up her anchor once or twice if I hadn't given her more cable."

"What time is it?" Harry inquired.

"About seven o'clock," Jake answered. "We'll have daylight soon after you're back."

They hauled up the canoe and were not surprised to find that she was full of water. It took them some time to bail her out, and Frank felt anxious when at last they pushed her clear of the sloop. It was difficult to tell how far off the beach was, and for the first few moments they could make no progress against the blast. Then they won a yard or two in a partial lull, and after that for a while barely held their own by determined paddling. Thick rain drove into their faces and the spray from the bows and splashing blades blew over them. Frank was breathless when they reached the beach, and it cost him an effort to scramble over the uneven stones as far as the edge of the bush, where a shadowy figure stood beside a horse. Its head drooped and even in the dark-

ness, which was not very deep, its attitude was suggestive of exhaustion. The man was dimly visible, and they felt sure that he was the messenger they expected.

"You're here on Barclay's business?" he said.

"Yes," said Harry. "Have you a message for him?"

The man fumbled in his pocket and took out an envelope.

"That's from the boss. I guess it will explain the thing, but he said I'd better let you know that we'd had trouble."

"Then you didn't get the dope men?"

"We corralled three of them; the rest broke away. One of the boys got a bullet in him and he's been lying in the rain all night. I don't know how we're going to pack him out."

"Things went wrong?" said Frank.

"They did," the man assented. "One of the boys got his pistol off by accident just after the boat had come ashore, and that gave our plans away. The boat's crew shoved off and several men who'd been landed broke through in the dark. Anyhow, when the trouble was over we'd got one case of dope, two whites of no account, and a Chinaman."

"And the schooner?"

"She was heading out to sea with mighty little sail on her when I left. You'll be able to take word through to Barclay?"

"I don't know," Harry answered dubiously. "It's too dark to tell what the sea's like now. I suppose there's no other means of warning him?"

"No," said the man. "Even if I could get a message on to the wire they wouldn't be able to deliver it at the other end, but he has to be warned somehow."

"If you'll come off we'll give you breakfast. It should be light enough to see what the weather's like by the time you had finished," Harry suggested.

"It can't be done," was the answer. "I've to go on

for a doctor and raise a crowd to run those fellows down. I've already stayed longer than I should."

"Your horse is played out," Frank objected.

"I'll hire another. There's a ranch somewhere ahead. I'll say you have taken that message."

"We'll do it if it's any way possible," said Harry.

The man turned away without another word and they heard him stumbling through the wood beside his horse until the roar of the wind drowned the sound, after which they went back to the canoe. They had no trouble in reaching the sloop, for they were driven down upon her furiously, and on clambering on board they found that Jake had breakfast ready.

It was daylight when they crawled out of the cabin after the meal, but the sky was hidden by low-flying vapor, and gazing seaward they could see only a short stretch of big leader combers which rolled up out of the haze crested with livid froth. Jake shook his head doubtfully at Harry.

"You'll have to stop a while," he said. "She wouldn't run for half an hour before that sea. We couldn't start till after dinner if the wind dropped right now, but it's falling and we might get away in the afternoon."

The morning dragged by while the boys chafed at the delay, though they had no doubt that Jake was right and neither of them felt any keen desire to face the sea that was tumbling in from the Pacific. Still, the roar of the wind steadily diminished and the sloop rode more easily, and at length Jake offered to make the venture after they had had a meal.

They lashed three reefs down before they started, leaving only a small triangular strip of mainsail set, but that proved quite enough, and during the first few minutes Frank felt almost appalled as he glanced at the great gray combers that heaved themselves up astern. Most of them were hollow breasted, and their tops curled over, flinging up long wisps of foam and roaring ominously.

As a rule they broke, divided, on either side of the boat, piling up in a snowy welter high about her shrouds, but now and then one seemed to break all over her and most of her deck was lost in a furious rush of water. Twice the canoe, which was too big to stow on deck, charged up and struck her with a resounding crash, and then broke adrift and disappeared.

By degrees, however, Frank's uneasiness diminished. Somewhat to his astonishment, the light and buoyant craft stood the buffeting, and by the time dusk fell the seas were getting smaller. Still, they were big enough, and the boat appeared to be driving before them at an extraordinary speed. By eight o'clock in the evening they had shaken out one reef, and soon afterward Frank lay down in the cabin, because Jake said that he had no intention of entrusting either him or Harry with the helm, which was on the whole a relief to both of them. To run a small craft before a breaking sea in the dark is a very severe test of nerve, and it is, perhaps, worse when the combers still come foaming after her after the wind has somewhat fallen.

In spite of the violent motion Frank managed to sleep until he was awakened some time after midnight by a shout from Jake. Crawling out, partly dazed, with his eyes half open, he saw that the sky had cleared and that a crescent moon was shining down. Then, close ahead of them, he saw the schooner.

She was also running, for her stern was toward them, though for a moment or two it was hidden by the white top of a sea, and Frank could only make out the forward half of her sharply tilted deck. Her bowsprit and two torn jibs above it were high in the air, and her black boom-foresail all bunched up, with its gaff, which had swung down, jammed against the foremast shrouds. She carried no after canvas, and the reason became evident when, as her stern lurched up, Frank saw that her mainmast was broken off short. She sank down again while

a comber foamed high about her rail, which was shattered on one quarter where the falling mast had struck, and a mass of canvas and tangled gear trailed in the sea beneath it. What struck the boy most, however, was the erratic manner in which she was progressing, for her bows swung up to windward every now and then until all her side was visible and she lumbered off at angle to her course and then came lurching back again. She was herringboning, as it is called at sea, in an extraordinary fashion, and she seemed low in the water.

In the meanwhile the sloop was coming up with her fast and Jake stood up at the tiller to see more clearly.

"They've been in trouble, sure," he said. "I could tell there was nobody at her helm when I first saw her and that's why I ran up so close. Ease the peak down, one of you; I don't want to run by until we've had a look at her."

Harry did so, and as they stood watching her the schooner slued round until she was almost beam to wind. The sea streamed down her weather side, which rose up like a wall, and Frank could see her wheel behind the low deckhouse jerking to and fro. There was no sign of life anywhere on board her.

"Deserted!" Jake said shortly. "They must have jibed her and smashed her mainmast. She seems a smart vessel. Seems to me she ought to fetch a good many dollars."

The sloop was sailing more slowly now with her peak swung down, keeping pace with the schooner but a little behind her, and the boys gazed hard at Jake. His rugged face looked very thoughtful in the moonlight.

"It's a fair wind to the islands and she'd come up until it was abeam with the foresail set if it was necessary," he said. "It wouldn't be much trouble to sail her in and she could be beached somewhere in smooth water. Anyhow, I'd like to get on board her."

"If you ran up close alongside when she screws to

windward one of us could jump," Harry suggested eagerly. "There's a raffle of ropes over her quarter."

Jake seemed dubious. "It might be done and Barclay would be uncommonly glad to get his hands on her, but I can't leave the sloop. Somebody has to take that message."

"Put us on board," urged Harry. "How far is it to the islands?"

"With this wind and the whole sail on her she ought to fetch them by daylight." Then Jake seemed to hesitate. "Looks as if there was water in her, but one could wear her round and fetch the land to southward if she was leaking very bad."

The boys looked at each other and the same impulse seized upon both of them. This was an adventure such as they had never dreamed of, and with a fair wind they would only have to keep the vessel running until they picked up the land. It would not be difficult, for she was under very easy sail, and the only hazard would be in the attempt to get on board her. Then Harry jumped forward and hauled up the peak.

"Run alongside as quick as you can," he said.

Jake put down his helm a little, and the boys stood up on the weather deck with tense, set faces as the sloop crept in under the schooner's lea. The latter slued to windward while the spray flew over her, rolling until her deck on the side nearest them was level with the sea, and then fell off again and sluggishly heaved her bows high above the foam. This herringboning was the danger, since it would need nerve and skill to get near her without wrecking the sloop. A blow from the big lurching hull would probably send her to the bottom.

Frank felt himself quivering all through as they closed with the derelict yard by yard, until when she once more lumbered round to windward Jake put down his helm a little farther. The sloop shot in beneath the black hull, which broke the sea and partly sheltered her, but as she

swept forward amidst a long wash of foam Frank's courage ebbed away from him. A great white swell lapped about the wall of wet planking close in front of him, and the top of it was higher than his head. It seemed impossible that he could spring out from the lurching sloop and by any means clamber up. All his senses shrank from the dangerous task, but with a determined effort he braced himself. If Harry made the attempt he would do it, too, and he clenched his hands and set his lips as the schooner's side came sinking down.

"Don't jump unless you are sure you can reach her!" shouted Jake.

They were now scarcely a fathom from the trailing wreckage, and the schooner's rail was dipping lower. It seemed just possible to clutch it by a desperate leap, and the next moment Harry launched himself out into the air. Frank followed, struck the wet planking, and seizing a trailing rope held on by it with his legs in the sea. Then he dragged himself up clear of the water, and Harry, who was kneeling in the opening in the broken rail, reached down to him.

Frank clutched his hand, and in a few more seconds was almost astonished to find himself, breathless and dripping, safe upon the schooner's deck. A glance showed him the sloop abreast of her quarter and about a dozen yards away.

"Jake did that mighty smartly," Harry gasped. "I'll get to the wheel while you look around her."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A GRIM DISCOVERY

FRANK had some difficulty in getting about the vessel. She was rolling wildly and loose ropes and blocks whipped blindly to and fro, but he noticed that the boat had gone, and the cleanly severed shrouds indicated that her mainmast had been cut loose after it had fallen over the side. It was evident that the crew had made some attempt to save the vessel before they abandoned her. The mainboom had disappeared, though the broken gaff and part of the sail were still attached to the hull by a mass of tangled gear. Scrambling forward he found the anchor lying still hooked to a tackle and half secured with its arms upon the rail, which suggested that the smugglers had sailed in haste and had been kept too busy afterward to make it fast. It was reassuring to discover that the anchor could be dropped without much trouble if this became necessary. Then he came upon a lantern hooked beneath the forecastle scuttle and went back to report to Harry. The latter, who was standing at the wheel, listened to him attentively.

"Well," he said at length, "I can't figure out the thing, and unless some of the dope men explain it I don't think we're likely to be much wiser. As Jake said, it looks as if they had jibed her by accident, which would probably rip out the mainmast, but, although it's easy to bring the mainboom over on a fore-and-aft rigged craft, it's mighty seldom that a capable sailor does it. Then, as there's water in her, they must have bumped her on a

reef, though she could only have struck once or twice before she drove over it. That's as far as I can get, and the first thing is to find out what water there is below. It's fortunate you have a lantern."

Frank looked around. There was no doubt that the wind was falling, and the schooner, having only part of her forward canvas set, steered easily. The sloop, which had sheered off a little farther, was sailing abreast of her with lowered peak about a hundred yards away, rising and falling with the long combers which, however, broke less angrily.

"Jake will stand by for three or four hours," Harry explained. "After that he'll have to haul her up to make the inlet where we were to join Barclay, but it will be close on daylight by then."

Frank was glad to hear it. There would be some peril in getting on board the sloop if that became necessary, but it was comforting to see her close at hand. In the meanwhile he shrank from going below and made no move to do so until Harry spoke again.

"I'm anxious about that water and you had better get down," he said. "Go in by the house; there'll probably be a lazaret below it with an opening in the deck."

Frank reluctantly scrambled forward around the house, the door of which faced toward the bows, and being out of the wind there he contrived to light the lantern, though he struck several matches in the attempt. The house, which occupied most of the vessel's quarter, was low so that the mainboom could swing over it, and it was evident that the cabin floor was sunk some feet below the level of the deck. Frank thrust the door open and then stood hesitating, holding up the lantern, which did not burn well and only flung a faint light into the obscurity before him. He could hear an ominous gurgle of water below when the schooner rolled and made out three or four steps which seemed to lead down into it. As he placed his foot on the first of them the vessel

lurched wildly and he went down with a bang, while the lantern flew out of his hand. For no very evident reason, except that he was overstrung, he could have shouted in alarm as he lay upon the wet flooring in the dark. He had struck his knee in his fall and for a moment or two he feared to move it.

Then he noticed a pale reflection against what he supposed to be the bottom of a seat, and as it was evident that the overturned lantern had not quite gone out he crawled toward it. As he did so the splash and gurgle of water seemed much louder than it had done on deck. He could hear it surge against the sides of the vessel and the hollow sound jarred upon his nerves. He longed to escape from the oppressive obscurity and get out into the moonlight by his companion's side, but he reflected that it would not be pleasant to tell Harry that he had run away from the darkness and left the lantern. He determined to secure the latter, and he was moving toward it on hands and knees when his fingers struck something that felt like a pistol. He let it lie, however, and stretched out his hand for the lantern, setting it upright. The flickering flame grew brighter, and standing up he flung the uncertain light about him. There was undoubtedly a revolver on the uncovered floor, which was dripping wet, and he thought it curious that the smugglers should have left the weapon lying in that position; but ever since he had boarded the schooner he had been troubled by an uncomfortable sense of strangeness. The fact that her crew had abandoned her, apparently without a sufficient reason, suggested a mystery. Then he raised his hand so that the radiance touched a little, clamped-down table, and as it did so he started and came near dropping the lantern again, for a man sat at the table with his head and shoulders resting upon it as if he had suddenly fallen forward.

Frank afterward confessed that his first impulse was to run toward the door, and he was never quite certain

why he did not do so, but he stood still holding up the lantern, while his heart throbbed painfully and his flesh seemed to creep. The bent figure was unnaturally still, but when the schooner lurched and the table slanted it fell forward a little farther, all in one piece — which was how he thought of it — and as a heavy sack would have done. That was too much for Frank, and clambering up the steps he ran back to Harry in breathless haste.

"You look as if something had scared you," said the latter with a trace of anxiety in his voice.

Frank leaned against the house, and his face showed white and set in the moonlight.

"There's a man lying across the table in the cabin," he panted.

Harry started, but he pulled up his helm a spoke or two.

"She'll come up if I leave her, but that won't matter much," he said. "We'll go back together."

Frank felt a little easier now that he had a companion, and he was more collected when he stood in the cabin holding up the light while Harry, who called first and got no answer, walked cautiously toward the huddled figure. Then he shrank back a pace or two.

"The man's dead!" he said.

After that neither of them moved for half a minute during which the deck slanted wildly beneath them, and then Frank proceeded very reluctantly toward the table. Harry followed him, and when they stooped over the shadowy figure Frank caught a partial glimpse of a yellow face and saw that the man wore a loose blue jacket.

"Turn the light a little," said Harry in a low, hoarse voice, and when Frank had done so he looked around at him.

"It's the man we got dinner with the day we went up the creek. He's been shot," he added.

Once more the horror of the thing was almost too much for Frank, but just then a furious thrashing of loose canvas and clatter of blocks broke out above them and relieved the tension.

"She's luffing with the sea on her quarter," said Harry. "I must get back to the helm, but we'll wait a moment and look around first. Lower your lantern. There's something on the floor — no, I don't mean the pistol, though you can pick that up."

He stooped down beside Frank, who held the lantern close to the wet planking, and saw for the first time a broad wet stain upon it leading toward the steps. That was enough for both of them, and saying nothing further they scrambled toward the door. They did not stop until they reached the wheel, and then Harry spent a few moments getting the vessel before the wind again.

"We're no wiser about the water yet," he said at length with a strained laugh.

"No," said Frank. "I didn't think about it — I only wanted to get out as quick as I could." He broke off, and then added, "What do you make of it?"

Harry stretched out one hand for the pistol, opened it, and held it up in the moonlight.

"There's a shell still in," he said. "The man it belonged to must have dropped it in a mighty hurry. It's clear that there was a row on board her either before or after she lost her mast. That Chinaman had a bullet through his head and somebody else was hurt, though he got out of the house — the stains showed that. I wonder" — and he dropped his voice — "if we ought to search the fore-castle."

"*I'm* not going down," Frank answered decisively.

"Well," said Harry, "I don't feel like it either. That's the simple fact."

Again there was silence for a while and both were glad that the solid end of the house stood between them and what lay in the cabin. Then Frank roused himself.

"We've forgotten about the water, but the hatch is smashed," he said. "I expect they dropped the boat upon it in heaving her out. I might get down that way."

"You had better try," said Harry, glancing around and pointing to the sloop, which was now nearer them. "Jake must have edged her in when he saw the schooner come up with no one at the helm," he added. "It's nice to feel that he's about."

Frank agreed with him. Once more he found the sight of the sloop curiously reassuring, but he scrambled forward, and, wriggling through a hole in the broken hatch, clambered partly down a beam. There was water below him, but there was less than he expected, and he could not hear any more pouring in, though he recognized that this would have been difficult on account of the gurgling and splashing that was going on. After listening for a minute or two he went back to Harry.

"There's a good deal of water in her," he said. "Hadn't we better heave some of it out?"

"I don't think it would be worth while," was Harry's answer. "You could hardly work the pump alone, and if I left the helm she'd keep running up into the wind and yawing about. I'd rather shove her along steadily toward the land."

"Then can't we get the foresail properly set and drive her a little faster?" Frank inquired. "She ought to bear it now the wind's dropping."

It was not only the leak that troubled him. He wanted to escape as soon as possible from the horror that seemed to pervade the vessel, and his companion eagerly seized upon the suggestion.

"Why, of course!" replied Harry. "I might have thought of it, but I've been kind of dazed since we got out of the cabin."

They went forward and led the halliards to the winch, but they would have had trouble in setting the partly lowered sail if the schooner had not come up into the

wind and relieved the strain on it. By degrees they heaved up the gaff and peaked it, after which they went aft, as the vessel plowed faster over the falling sea.

"Now," said Frank, "the question is, where are we heading for?"

"I've been worrying over that while we set the sail," Harry responded. "If we hauled her up right now we might, perhaps, fetch the inlet where we arranged to join Barclay, but we'd have to jibe the foresail over, and as I would have to keep the helm while I brought her round and you wouldn't be able to check the sheet alone, it's very likely that something would smash when the boom came across. Besides that, we'd have a strip of rocky coast to lee of us presently, and we mightn't be able to keep her off it with only the foresail set. On the other hand, so far as I can recollect from looking at the chart, the islands are dead to leeward and we'd only have to keep her running to reach them. There's a sound where we'd find smooth water once we sailed her in. That would be the wiser plan."

Frank, concurring in this, sat down near the helm. He felt that he would not like to go far away, and he remembered that night watch long afterward.

The moon crept on to the westward, getting lower, and now and then flying clouds obscured the silvery light. The combers still came surging after them crested with glittering froth, though they no longer broke about the rail, and there was a constant gurgling and splashing of water inside the lurching vessel. At last Jake jibed the sloop's mainsail over and stood away from them. The moon was very low now and Frank grew somewhat uneasy as he watched the boat's canvas fade into the creeping gloom. Shortly afterward the moon dipped altogether and it was very dark.

"We can't be far off the land," said Harry. "I don't want to come up with it before daylight, but with no after canvas on her I don't suppose we could round her

up and wait. If we did, I'm not sure we could get her to fall off again—one of the jibs is torn to ribands and the other's split. We'll have to keep her running."

They drove on and presently a faint gray light crept across the water to the east. A little later, when all the sky was flushed with red and saffron, a long black smear cut sharply across the glow.

"The first of the islands," announced Harry. "It's right abeam. We must get some foresail sheet in."

They had difficulty in doing so, though they led the sheet to the winch, but the schooner came up closer afterward, and when the sun had climbed above a bank of cloud the end of the island was rising before them and a strip of water opening up beyond it. Half an hour later they ran in with the foresail peak lowered down, and Frank gazed anxiously ahead as they drove on more slowly up a broad channel. On one hand there were rocks and scrubby pines, with larger trees behind, but he wondered what the result would be if a reef or a jutting point lay in front of them. The vessel's speed, however, grew slower still, the water became smoother, and at last Harry looked around at him.

"If you'll unhook the tackle and cut the lashing you ought to get the anchor over," he remarked. "I'll luff her as far as possible and you'll heave the thing off when I drop the foresail."

There followed a clatter of blocks, and a furious rattle of running chain, which presently stopped. Then as the swinging vessel drew her cable out they toiled desperately at the windlass to heave up more of it from below. The task was almost beyond their strength, but somehow they managed it and Harry clapped on a chain stopper.

"That should hold her," he said. "There's not much wind now. I'd be glad to leave her if I could get ashore."

This, however, was out of the question, since the

canoe had gone, and very much against their will they waited on board for several hours until at length a trail of smoke arose above the pines. Then a little steamer with foam about her bows appeared from behind a point and the hoot of her whistle rang sharply across the water.

"Barclay, sure!" said Harry. "I'm certainly glad to see him."

A few minutes later Mr. Barclay climbed on board and went down into the cabin and all over the vessel with them before he made any remarks. At length he turned to the boys as they stood by the rail.

"You have done a very smart thing and I don't think you'll have any reason for regretting it," he said pointedly. "This is a good set-off against the failure at the other end. Jake got in with the message and we started as soon as I'd had a talk with him. Fortunately, we were able to creep along through the sounds and it's scarcely likely that any of the smugglers can have seen us."

"But what has become of this vessel's crew?" Frank asked.

"I don't know," replied Mr. Barclay. "We'll probably ascertain something about them later."

"Do you expect to corral the rest of them to-night?" Harry broke in.

"It's possible," said Mr. Barclay with a trace of dryness. "The first thing, however, is to beach this vessel, and then you and Jake must get off in the sloop. There's a good deal to be done, and I want to run the steamer back out of sight up the inlet as soon as it can be managed."

He called some of his companions on board, and when Frank and Harry sat down to an excellent meal in the steamer's cabin they heard the men heaving the schooner's anchor.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RAID

DAYLIGHT was breaking when the boys ran into the cove near the ranch after a quick passage and saw Mr. Oliver standing on the beach.

"I've been looking out for you rather anxiously," he said when he had shaken hands with them. "Has Barclay been successful?"

"No," said Harry, "not altogether. Some of the dope men got away at the first place where they landed."

Mr. Oliver looked rather grave at this. "How many of them escaped?"

"I don't know exactly. The messenger said several. Besides, the crew of the schooner abandoned her, and it seems likely that they got ashore. That would make two parties who may have joined each other."

"Ah!" said Mr. Oliver; "it's a pity in various ways! How did Barclay get on at the other end?"

"I can't tell you. He didn't expect to make the seizure until night when the dope men's friends would be waiting for the schooner to run in, and he sent us off in the afternoon."

"It was wise of him," Mr. Oliver answered. "In the meanwhile your aunt hasn't cleared breakfast away, and as I expect you're ready for it we'll go in at once."

During the meal they gave him an outline of their adventures, to which he listened thoughtfully. Then he said:

"You had better lie down and get a sleep. We'll have another talk about it later on."

"I think I'd rather work," said Frank. "We got some sleep in turns last night, and I don't feel like lying down. The fact is," he added hesitatingly, "we've been doing something or other so hard since we went away that I don't think I could leave off all at once. I feel strung up yet and I'd rather keep busy."

Mr. Oliver smiled understandingly. "That's sensible. There's nothing as good as your regular work for cooling you off and helping you to get calm again; but if you like you can take a note over to Webster and you needn't hurry back if he asks you to have dinner with him. Then there are two or three stumps you may as well grub out."

They set out soon afterward and Frank, for one, was glad of the walk. He had been cramped on board the sloop, and the excitement of the last few days had told on him. He was nervously restless and felt that it would be useless to lie down until he was physically worn out. When he mentioned it to Harry the latter confessed to a similar sensation, and added that they had not yet finished with the dope men.

Mr. Webster was at work in his clearing when they reached it, but he walked with them to his house, dropping Mr. Oliver's note into the stove as soon as he read it.

"You'll have dinner before you go back and tell your father I'll come along," he said. "Would you like to take that single gun with you, Frank? Harry still has the other one."

Frank said that he would be very glad, but his companion broke in:

"What did dad ask you to come over for?"

"He wasn't very precise," answered Mr. Webster evasively. "He'll probably tell me more when I'm at the ranch."

As it was evident that he did not mean to be communicative, they ate their dinner without asking any

further questions, but when they were walking home through the bush Harry smiled at his companion significantly.

"What do you make of the whole thing?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Frank. "Your father looked troubled when he heard the dope men had got away."

"He did," assented Harry. "Then he sent over for Webster, who wouldn't tell us what he was wanted for, though he made you take that gun along."

Frank knitted his brows.

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "it's only an idea of mine, but it's possible that the fellows who escaped might make an attack upon the ranch out of revenge. Now if we allow that the schooner had been driving along before the wind for some time after she was abandoned — and several things pointed to it — one would fancy that the men who left her must have landed not very far from the spot where Barclay's men tried to seize them. It seems to me the first thing they'd do would be to attempt to join the rest so as to be strong enough to resist a posse sent out to hunt them down. It would be clear that somebody had given them away and they'd no doubt blame your father. Of course they suspected him already."

"You've hit it," said Harry, whose face grew stern. "If they come along there'll be trouble, but we'll make some of it. I don't feel kind to the dope men after that sight in the schooner's cabin."

Frank thought that his companion wore very much the same look as his father had done on the morning when he stood beside the fallen horse with the smoking pistol in his hand.

"I expect they'll be desperate now," he said, but Harry did not answer, and they walked on a little faster.

On arriving at the ranch they set about grubbing up the stumps and managed to get one big one out during the few hours' daylight that remained, but neither of them

were sorry when Miss Oliver called them in to supper. Frank, however, stood still a moment or two, glancing about him and leaning upon his grubhoe. There was not a breath of wind stirring, and the firs rose in dense shadowy masses against a soft gray sky. The light was fading off the clearing, the rows of stumps had grown blurred and dim, and it was impressively still. The whole surroundings looked very peaceful; one could imagine them steeped in continual tranquillity, but Frank remembered the broken mower and became vaguely uneasy. Besides, he could not get the scene in the schooner's cabin, where the dead man lay fallen forward across the table, out of his mind. Then Miss Oliver called him again, and making an effort to throw off this exceedingly unpleasant train of thought he strode quickly toward the house.

They sat about the stove after supper, and Frank fancied that Mr. Oliver was listening for something now and then, but for a while no sound rose from the clearing. He made the boys give him a few more particulars about their adventures.

"What do you suppose Barclay meant when he said that we would not be sorry we had brought the schooner in?" asked Harry.

"Well," his father replied, when he had considered a moment, "the vessel was abandoned when you fell in with her. If she had been employed in a legitimate trade you could have enforced a claim for your services and you would have had no difficulty in getting a large share of her value. The affair, however, is complicated by the fact that she was engaged in smuggling, because, while I don't know much about these matters, I'm inclined to believe that would warrant the revenue authorities in either seizing her altogether or holding her as security for a heavy fine. Still, even in this case, you should have a claim and I've no doubt that Barclay will look after your interests."

"Have you any idea what our share would be?" Frank asked eagerly.

"I could only make a guess. As she seems to be a comparatively new vessel and is probably in good repair except for the damage she received on the night in question I think you could hold out for two thousand dollars. It's quite possible that she only started a plank or two, and a new mainmast wouldn't cost a great deal."

"Two thousand dollars!" and Frank gasped with astonishment.

"I believe the award depends upon the value of the services rendered and the hazard incurred," Mr. Oliver answered with a smile. "There seems very little doubt that the vessel would have gone to the bottom if you hadn't fallen in with her, and I expect any arbitrator would admit that in running alongside and getting on board her in a heavy sea you did a dangerous thing. Jake, of course, would take a share, though his would be a smaller one than yours; but Barclay will be able to tell you more about it than I can. We must get his advice as soon as possible."

Shortly afterward Mr. Webster arrived carrying a rifle, and Frank observed that Mr. Oliver was glad to see him. They, however, only discussed fruit growing and the price of stock, and when by and by the boys became drowsy Mr. Oliver told them that they had better go to bed.

The boys were about to withdraw to their room, when Harry had a sudden thought.

"Where's the dog?" he asked.

"In the stable," said Mr. Oliver dryly. "We have kept him there the last few nights."

It occurred to Frank that this had been done as a precaution, since the stable and barn stood close together at some little distance from the house, but Harry made some careless answer and they turned away toward their

room. When they reached it Harry sat down on his bed and his face looked grave in the lamplight.

"Dad's expecting trouble," he said. "You noticed that all the guns were laid handy and there was a lot of shot as well as rifle shells spread out loose on the shelf."

"Do you think the dope men will come to-night?"

"I can't say. I wouldn't be astonished if they did. Anyhow, I'm dead played out and we can go to sleep, because dad and Webster mean to sit up all night. I don't know whether you noticed that the coffee pot was on the stove and dad had his cigar box out."

Frank had not noticed it, but he had already discovered that in some matters his companion's eyes were sharper than his own. He, however, made no comment, for a heavy weariness had seized him at last and he was glad to get his clothes off and go to bed. He was soon asleep and some hours had passed when he felt Harry's hand upon his shoulder. Raising himself suddenly, he looked around. The room was very dark, and he could hear nothing until a door latch clicked below and he fancied that he heard stealthy footsteps outside the building.

"You had better get up and dress as quick as you can," said Harry. "That's Webster crossing the clearing. Dad slipped out a minute or two before him."

Frank scrambled into his clothes and followed Harry to the window, where they leaned upon the ledge. There was no doubt that somebody was moving away from the house, because they could hear the withered grass rustle and now and then the faint crackle of a twig, but they could see nothing except the leafless fruit trees and the black wall of bush shutting in the clearing.

Then a savage growl that sounded dulled and muffled broke out from the stable, and Frank felt a little quiver run through him. The sound died away and he found

the heavy silence that followed it hard to bear, but a few moments later the dog growled again and then broke into a series of short, snapping barks.

"If he gets loose somebody's going to be sorry," said Harry with a harsh, strained laugh. Then he gripped Frank's arm hard. "Look yonder!"

A yellow blaze suddenly leaped up beside the barn and grew brighter rapidly, until Frank made out a man's black figure outlined against it. He seemed to be throwing an armful of brush or withered twigs upon the spreading fire, and Frank swung around toward his companion.

"Hadn't we better shout or run down?" he asked.

"Wait," said Harry shortly. "Dad's already on that fellow's trail."

He was right, for while the figure bent over the fire a thin streak of red sparks flashed out from among the fruit trees and the crash of a rifle filled the clearing. The man leaped back from the fire, ran a few paces at headlong speed, and vanished suddenly into the shadow.

"He's not hurt," Frank said hoarsely.

"Then it's because dad didn't mean to hit him," Harry answered. "That was a warning."

"He doesn't seem to be going to put out the fire."

"No," said Harry with the same strained laugh, "dad knows too much for that. Those logs are thick, they won't light easy, and it's only a little pile of small stuff that's burning. Dad has no use for standing out where those fellows can see him unless it's necessary. In the meanwhile the dope men don't know where he is and that's going to worry them."

Frank could understand this. It seemed very likely that the small fire would burn out before the logs caught, and it was clear that the men who had made it could not run back into the light to throw on more brushwood without incurring the hazard of being shot. On the other hand, Mr. Oliver would have to face the same peril

if he approached to put it out. From this it seemed very probable that both he and the dope men would wait to see what the result would be.

In the meanwhile the crash of the rifle had had a curious effect on Frank. It was the first time that he had ever seen a shot fired in anger and he was sufficiently well acquainted with Mr. Oliver's character to feel certain that if the warning failed to prove efficacious the next bullet would not go wide. He felt his nerves tingle and caught his breath more quickly, for it seemed highly probable that he might be shortly called on to watch or, perhaps, take part in some horrible thing. He did not mean to shirk it, but at the same time he was conscious that he would have greatly preferred to be standing beside the schooner's wheel while she lurched over the big foaming seas.

The suspense became almost intolerable as he watched the fire, which presently sank until at last only a feeble, flickering blaze was left. Then a figure sprang out of the shadow and ran toward it carrying something in its arms. The next moment there was another crash in a different part of the clearing from where they had heard the first shot, and the figure, dropping its burden, vanished suddenly.

"That's Webster," said Harry dryly. "I'm not sure that he meant to miss."

In the meanwhile the savage barking of the dog, whom they had scarcely noticed during the last few moments, once more forced itself upon their attention.

"Why doesn't your father let the dog get after them?" Frank asked.

"I don't know," Harry answered. "It's possible he'd rather not have them routed out from among the trees. If it were only daylight we could stand them off! Have you your watch?"

Frank took it from his pocket and rubbed a sulphur match in nervous haste. It went out and he struck

another with quivering fingers. A pale glow of light sprang up and he held the watch close against it.

"Only four o'clock!" he announced. "There'll be more than three hours' darkness yet."

Harry made no answer, and except for the barking of the dog there was silence for a minute or two. It was Frank at last who broke it.

"I can't stand any more of this," he said. "Let's go down."

His companion seemed to hesitate. "It's not nice, but I don't know what to do. Aunt's in the house, and though Jake's on the lookout somewhere I've a notion that dad would call us if he meant us to come." He broke off and added in a very suggestive tone, "I don't — want — to stay in."

"We could go as far as the door, anyway," Frank persisted.

They slipped out of the room and made for the kitchen very quietly, but Frank was a little astonished when they reached it, because though there was no lamp burning the front of the stove was open and the faint glow which shone out fell upon Miss Oliver who was sitting close by. A rifle lay upon the table at her side and Jake's shadowy figure showed up near the open window.

"Where are you going, Harry?" she asked.

Harry stopped and leaned upon the table. "Out into the clearing a little way. After that, I don't know. I don't want to spoil dad's plans by butting in before it's necessary, but I wish he'd told us what to do. You won't mind if we go?"

"I've Jake — and this," Miss Oliver answered, quietly pointing to the rifle. "On the whole I think I'd just as soon you tried to find out what is going on, but keep out of sight while you're about it and be cautious."

They slipped out, and when they stopped at a short distance from the house Frank touched his companion.

"Can she shoot?" he asked.

"It's my opinion that she'd beat you at it every time," said Harry curtly.

He raised his hand as though to demand silence, and they both stood listening, but there was deep silence now, for the dog had ceased to bark. It was difficult to imagine that somewhere in the shadowy clearing there were a number of men watching with every sense alert.

"I think the first shot came from the other side of the fruit trees. We'll look in among them," said Harry.

Treading very softly, they made for the trees, which were young and had shed their leaves, but their trunks and branches, massed in long rows, offered concealment. They would not entirely cover up the figure of any one standing among them, but they would break its outline, which is almost as effective since, as Frank had already learned, it is singularly difficult to recognize an object when one can only see a part of it. Besides, the sky was overcast and there was no moon visible.

The boys walked a few steps and stopped again to consider. It was as still as ever, and there was nothing to guide them in deciding where Mr. Oliver or Mr. Webster might be, while they recognized that any noise they made would probably be followed by a rifle shot. The smugglers and ranchers would naturally be listening for the least sound that might betray each other's presence. The first incautious movement would therefore lay either party open to attack, and Frank could understand the smuggler's hesitation in making another attempt to burn the barn, since, apart from any noise they made, the figure of the man who started the fire would be forced up clearly by the light. Indeed, he fancied that so long as the two men kept still their opponents must do the same.

In the meanwhile he found it singularly difficult to crouch in the grass waiting and listening. It would have been much easier to move forward, even at the hazard of drawing the smuggler's fire upon himself,

but as this was out of the question he restrained the desire to do so by an effort of his will. To hasten an attack would interfere with Mr. Oliver's plans, and there was no doubt that the odds against the rancher were already heavy. Frank, however, could not keep his heart from thumping painfully or his fingers from trembling upon the gun barrel. Never had time seemed to pass so slowly.

Several minutes dragged by and still no sound rose from the surrounding fruit trees or shadowy clearing. It almost seemed as if Mr. Oliver and his opponents meant to lie motionless until the morning, which Frank realized was a good deal more than he could force himself to do.

CHAPTER XXX

THE RELIEF OF THE RANCH

THE silence was becoming unendurable when it was suddenly broken by two sharp, ringing crashes in quick succession. Though Frank was afterward ashamed of it, he fairly jumped and came very nearly dropping his gun. While he was struggling with an impulse to fire at random into the darkness there was an answering bang and he felt a tug at his elbow.

"I think it was Webster who fired first," said Harry in a low, tense voice. "If I'm wrong, it means that the dope men have got in between us and the house, but that isn't likely. Dad would have heard them and made a move if they'd tried it."

Frank said nothing, and when the echoes died away among the woods there was once more a nerve-trying silence, except for the savage barking of the dog. It lasted a few minutes, and then Harry spoke again:

"The shots will be quite enough to put dad on to those fellows' trail. I expect he's crawling in on them now."

The boy's whisper was hoarse with anxiety, but he made no attempt to move and Frank wondered at his self-command. Shortly afterward there was an unexpected change in the situation, for a faint flicker of light shot up again from where Frank supposed the barn to be. This was puzzling, because, while the light was rather high up and there seemed to be a brighter blaze beneath it, Frank could not see the fire. Then the explanation flashed upon him as the black shape of the building

became dimly visible against the uncertain glow. The smugglers had lighted a second fire behind the barn, which now stood between them and Mr. Oliver. Frank gasped with dismay as he realized that it was a simple and effective trick. If the rancher moved forward hastily he must betray himself to his enemies by the noise he made, while if he proceeded slowly and cautiously the barn would probably take fire before he reached a spot from which he could drive back the men, who were no doubt piling up brushwood against the building.

"It looks as if they'd got us!" he whispered.

"No," said Harry sharply and aloud. "The thing didn't strike me, but dad's not to be caught like that. Now, as any row we make will draw them off him, we'll hurry up. Get up and run."

Frank did so, but although he had been longing to do something of the kind a few minutes earlier he found that he had no great liking for the part Harry expected him to play. It was decidedly unpleasant to feel that in all probability he was fixing upon himself the attention of several men who could shoot very well. He had gone only a few paces, however, when there was a shot from behind the barn and Harry laughed—a breathless laugh.

"That's dad. He's headed them off again!" he said.

Frank ran on, but thrilling as he was with excitement it occurred to him that this battle was a rather intricate one, in which he was right. These bushmen were accustomed to hunting and trailing, and did not rush at each other's throats, shouting and firing more or less at random. Instead, they seemed to be maneuvering for positions from which they could prevent their opponents from making another move. Nowadays, in any battle large or small, in which men are engaged who can handle the terrible modern rifle, the position is the one essential

thing, since it is only the most desperate courage that can drive home an attack upon a well-covered firing line.

Soon after the boys had heard the shot a shadowy figure slipped out from among the fruit trees close in front of them and Frank called, "Webster!"

The man swung around, but instead of answering he sprang backward, and Frank realized that he had almost run into the arms of one of the smugglers. The boys did not see where he went, though he made some noise, and they afterward concluded that he had mistaken them for grown men. In the meanwhile they went on again more cautiously, until at length they were stopped by a low cry and Mr. Oliver rose from the grass a few feet away. They were on the other side of the barn now and could see that the fire had got hold of it. There was no doubt that some of the logs were burning and a pile of brushwood which had been laid against them was burning fiercely.

"It's spreading," said Harry. "Can't we put it out?"

"No," said his father with grim quietness. "It would take time and at least a dozen wet grain bags, while it wouldn't be safe for any one to approach the light."

There was something in his voice that startled Frank.

"You have hit one of them?" he asked.

"There's reason for believing it. Webster and I couldn't watch the four sides of the barn, and they chose the one that seemed the most unlikely. Still, as it happened, I got around quick enough."

"Then what are we to do now?" Harry inquired.

"Fall back on the house," replied Mr. Oliver. "I've sent Webster on, and it's no use waiting for another of them to come out into the light."

The boys turned back with him, moving quickly but making no more noise than they could help, and on reaching the dwelling they found Mr. Webster standing in the kitchen. The room was dark except for the faint

glow which shone out from the front of the stove, and Miss Oliver was still sitting where the boys had last seen her, with an open box of cartridges at her feet. There was, however, light enough outside, for a red glare which grew steadily brighter streamed across the clearing.

"Where's the dog?" Harry asked.

"I don't know," said Mr. Webster. "I let him out before I came along. I expect you're going to hear him presently."

There was silence for the next six or seven minutes during which Frank heard the ticking of a clock and the crackle of knotty pinewood in the stove. He could see Mr. Oliver standing a little on one side of the open window, an indistinct figure with face and hands that showed dimly white. His pose indicated that he was holding a rifle level with his breast, and presently as the red glow behind the fruit trees grew higher and brighter the barrel twinkled in a ray of light. Then there was a furious barking and Jake laughed at the sound.

"Well," he said, "they don't mean to keep us waiting."

Mr. Oliver turned to the boys. "Keep clear of this window and watch the other one. You're not to fire a shot unless I tell you."

The barking of the dog grew louder and it was evident that the animal was following the smugglers toward the house, but Frank could see nobody for a while. Then he made out two or three moving shadows among the fruit trees, but they vanished again as the light sank, and he almost wished that they would spring out from cover and make a rush upon the building. He could imagine them creeping stealthily nearer and nearer, and the strain of the forced inaction became nearly unbearable. He learned that night that it is often a good deal easier to fight than to wait.

At last a harsh voice rose from the gloom.

"You'll have to get out, Oliver," it said. "Clear out in your sloop with the folks you have with you and we'll let you go. You're mighty lucky in getting the option."

"And what about the ranch?" Mr. Oliver asked.

"We'll tend to it," another man answered pointedly. "Pitch your guns through the window and come out right now!"

"You're wasting time," replied Mr. Oliver, "I'm going to stay."

"Then you'll certainly be sorry," some one else broke in. "We've had about enough trouble right along with you and we've come to hand in the bill. You headed us off a good trade, you brought the revenue folks in, and we mean to get even before we leave. Just now we'll be satisfied with your homestead, but that won't be enough after the next shot's fired."

It was a grim warning and what made it more impressive to Frank was the fact that he could not see the man who uttered it. So far, the smugglers had only revealed their presence by their voices. The next moment there was a cry of pain or alarm and a rifle flashed.

"Kill that blamed dog," somebody ordered with an oath.

Then Mr. Oliver called to Harry, who had gone to the window across the room.

"Can you see anybody on that side?" he asked.

"No," was the answer. "I think they're all in front."

Mr. Oliver turned to Jake. "Slip out through the back window with the boys and work around to the stumps. From there you'll have those fellows clear against the light. Wait until the shooting starts — and then do what you can."

"Sure!" was the short answer, and Jake crossed the room.

Harry had already dropped from the window, and Frank promptly followed him, feeling relieved now that

he had something definite to do. Circling around through the fruit trees they reached the first row of stumps, one end of which ran up rather close to the house. As Frank crouched down among the roots of one he saw the smugglers. There were six or seven of them visible along the edge of the trees, though he fancied that there were more of them farther back in the shadows, which grew thinner and then more dense again as the light rose and fell. Still, before the men could reach the house they would have to cross a clear space where the glow was brighter, which they were evidently reluctant to do. Their hesitation was very natural, since they had discovered that their opponent was unusually quicksighted and handy with the rifle.

A few moments after the boys reached the stumps a great blaze shot up as part of the barn fell in, and Frank saw a man who seemed to be the leader of the gang run forward, heading toward the back of the house. As he did so Frank recognized him and Harry cried out softly, for one of the runner's shoulders was higher than the other and he had a rather curious gait. Then there was a shout from one of those behind.

"Plug the brute! Look out for the dog!"

A low and very swift shadow flashed across the open space behind the man. Harry laughed hoarsely as the man went down and rolled over with an indistinct object apparently on his back. He cried out, there was a confused shouting, and some of his companions came running toward him, showing black against the light. Frank held his breath as he watched. He expected to see two flashes from the window, since Mr. Webster and Mr. Oliver had now an easy mark, but they did not fire. The next moment he shrank in sudden horror, for the cries grew sharper and suggested pain and an extremity of fear. Then he felt that, regardless of the hazard, he could almost have cheered the smugglers on as they ran toward the prostrate man, who was struggling vainly

with the furious dog. They surged about him in a confused group, and just then, to Frank's amazement, a pistol flashed among the firs on the edge of the bush. It was followed by a sudden clamor, whereupon the group broke up, and running men streamed out across the clearing. The smugglers vanished, and Harry sprang out from among the stumps shouting wildly.

"It's Barclay! He's brought a posse with him!" he cried. "Come on. We must choke off the dog."

When they reached the spot they tried with all their might to drag back the furious animal. The man, who had flung his arms about his throat and face, now lay still, with the big and powerful animal still tearing at him. It was not until Jake arrived and partly stunned it with his rifle butt that it let go, and then two or three breathless strangers came running up to them. They dragged the smuggler to his feet and Frank saw that his jacket was torn to pieces and that the back of his neck from which it fell away was red. He did not seem capable of speaking and he drew his breath in gasps, but the newcomers hustled him along between them toward the house.

"Stick to him," said Harry. "He's the boss of the gang."

They thrust the man into the kitchen, where he fell into a chair and, for the lamp was lighted now, gazed at Mr. Oliver stupidly.

"Well," he said, "I'm corralled—my gun's in the clearing." He raised his hand to his neck and brought it down smeared red before he added, "It's mighty lucky he didn't get hold in front."

Mr. Oliver, who made no answer, swung around and faced Mr. Barclay standing hot and breathless in the doorway smiling at them.

"It's fortunate I came along," he said, and striding forward glanced at the man in the chair. "We've got you at last."

"Sure!" admitted the other, still in a half-dazed manner. "I'll have to face it — only keep off that dog."

Mr. Barclay looked around at Mr. Oliver. "I expect the boys have also got most of his partners. Before we broke cover I sent a party to head them off."

Harry suddenly called to Frank, who sprang toward the door, but when they reached the bush they met the rest of the men coming back with several prisoners. They reported that two or three had escaped and they would have to wait for daylight before following their trail.

Half an hour later the boys sat down again in the kitchen where Mr. Oliver and Mr. Barclay, who had been out in the meanwhile, were talking by the stove.

"I'd an idea that these fellows might look you up, which was why I came along as fast as I could manage," Mr. Barclay was explaining. "I think I told you we got practically every man who was waiting for the schooner at the inlet, and the two or three who escaped to-night won't count. In the meanwhile I'd arranged at two or three different places to seize everybody we suspected of having a hand in the thing, and if the boys I left that work to have been as lucky as we are we can take it for granted that we have put an end to the gang. There's enough against the fellow the dog mauled to have him sent up for the rest of his life." He broke off and turned to the boys. "The schooner will be sold by auction, and if you are inclined to leave the matter in my hands you can give me a written claim for salvage services."

"How much should we put down?" Harry asked.

"I would suggest three thousand dollars," responded Mr. Barclay with twinkling eyes. "It doesn't follow that you'll be awarded the whole of it, but it's generally admitted that one shouldn't be too modest in sending in a claim. If you two become partners you could buy a ranch."

Harry turned with a smile to Frank. "Well," he said, "if you're willing, we might consider it in a year or two."

Then one of the men came in to report that the prisoners had been secured in the stable. Mr. Barclay soon dismissed him with a few brief instructions and sat down again, lighting a cigar.

"I don't know that there's much more to tell," he said. "When we were a mile or two off the cove we saw the blaze of your barn, and that gave us an idea of what was going on. We sent the steamer along as fast as she could travel, but I broke my posse up to surround the clearing as soon as we got ashore. Then we lay by and waited so as to get as many of the gang as possible. They were too busy watching you to notice any little noise the boys made, and on the whole I think we can be content with this night's work."

"Have you decided what led up to the shooting of that man in the schooner's cabin?" Harry asked.

"That," said Mr. Barclay, "is a matter for the criminal court, but I've made a few investigations, and my notion is that the fellows lost their nerve when it became evident that somebody had given them away. They suspected one another, and that led to trouble, while I've no doubt that the Chinaman held most of the secrets of the gang. He'd be a particular object of suspicion, but from what I can gather there was a general row during which she jibed and got ashore. There was, at least, one other man badly hurt, but they seem to have gone off in the same boat. The vessel probably struck on an outlying reef and came off almost immediately on the rising tide."

Frank went out soon afterward and sat down near the house. The fire had almost burned out and a light wind which had sprung up drove the last of the smoke the other way. The air that flowed about the boy was sweet and scented with the fragrance of pine and cedar.

All around him the bush rose in somber masses and a faint elfin sighing fell from the tops of the tall black trees. It was the song of the wilderness and the wild and rugged land had steadily tightened its hold on him. As he sat and listened he was certain at last that he would never leave it to go back to the cities.

CHAPTER XXXI

FRANK BECOMES A RANCH OWNER

THREE or four days had passed since the attack on the ranch when one afternoon the boys stood on the deck of the sloop. Bright sunshine streamed down on the cove and there was a brisk breeze. The boys had gone down to hoist the mainsail so that it would dry, as it had been rolled up damp when last used; and as Frank straightened himself after stooping to coil up the gear he noticed that a man stood at the edge of the water with a small camera in his hand.

"Look, Harry!" he exclaimed softly, as his companion crawled from behind the sail.

"Hello!" called Harry. "What do you want?"

"Keep still!" commanded the stranger sharply. Then he raised his hand. "That's all right! Now you may move if you like."

"So may you!" Harry answered with a chuckle. "In fact, I guess you better had!"

There was an ominous growl somewhere above the man and then a savage barking, as the dog—who had followed the boys to the cove and afterward wandered away—came scrambling furiously down the steep path. The man seemed to watch its approach with anxiety, and when it came toward him growling he stooped and picked up a big stone.

"Hold on!" Harry shouted. "Put down that stone! He doesn't like strangers, and you'd better not rile him."

The man did as he was bidden, but when it looked as if the dog would drive him into the water Frank

dropped into the canoe. To his astonishment, the stranger suddenly held the camera in front of him and backed away a few paces, pointing it like a pistol at the growling dog, who seemed too surprised to follow. Then Frank ran the canoe ashore and told the man to get in while he drove off the dog.

"He's young," explained Frank. "Somehow we haven't managed to tame him."

He headed for the sloop, and the man got on board.

"You seem stuck on taking photographs," Harry remarked.

"I make a little out of them now and then," the stranger answered with a smile. "You're Harry Oliver?"

"That's my name."

"Then your friend is Frank Whitney?"

"Yes," replied Harry. "But you haven't answered my question yet."

"I wanted to have a talk with your father; but I find that he's out."

"He won't be back until to-night; and, while we'd be glad to give you supper, it really wouldn't be worth while to wait. He doesn't want any fruit trees—the last we bought from outsiders had been dug up too long. He's full up with implements, and we're not open to buy anything."

The stranger laughed good-humoredly.

"Hadn't you better wait until you're asked? I'm not drumming up orders." Then he changed the subject. "You've had trouble here lately, haven't you? From what I gather, your father has done a smart and courageous thing in holding off that opium gang."

Harry thawed and fell into the trap. He was not addicted to saying much about his own exploits, but he was proud of his father, and the man discovered this from his hesitating answer. It was the latter's business to draw people out, and sitting down in the shelter of

the coaming he cleverly led the boy on to talk. Frank tried to warn his companion once or twice, but failed, and soon the stranger drew him also into the conversation. Some time had slipped away when the man finally rose.

"I'm sorry I missed your father," he said, "but as I want to catch the steamer that calls at the settlement to-night, I must be getting back."

Harry paddled him ashore, and when he returned with the dog Frank grinned at him.

"That fellow hasn't told you his business yet, and I've a pretty strong suspicion that he's a newspaper man."

Harry started and frowned.

"Then if he prints all that stuff I've told him it's a sure thing that dad will be jumping mad. Didn't you know enough to call me off?"

"You wouldn't stop," Frank answered, laughing. "I kept on winking for the first five minutes, and then somehow he gathered me in too. He's smart at his business."

"I guess we'd better not say anything about the thing," decided Harry thoughtfully. "Anyway, not until we know whether you are right."

They went ashore soon afterward; and a few days later Mr. Webster called at the ranch.

"Have you Barclay's address?" he asked Mr. Oliver. "I want to write him."

Mr. Oliver gave it to him, and Mr. Webster continued:

"They're getting up a supper at the settlement, and the stewards would like to have you and the boys come. They're asking everybody between here and Carthew."

"What do they want to get up a supper for?"

Mr. Webster hesitated.

"Well," he said, "among other things, the new man is opening his big fruit ranch, and we've just heard that there's a steamboat wharf to be built and a new wagon trail made. Things are looking up, and the boys feel that they ought to have a celebration."

"All right," assented Mr. Oliver, "the boys and I will be on hand."

A few minutes later Mr. Webster started home, and then Frank opened a letter he had brought him. He was astonished when he read it.

"It's from Mr. Marston, who got me the position with the milling company—he's a relative of ours," he informed Mr. Oliver. "It appears that he is in Portland on business—shipping Walla wheat—and he says that he promised my mother he'd look me up if he had time. He may be here shortly."

"We'd be glad to see him," Mr. Oliver answered cordially. "It isn't a very long way to Portland."

Frank, however, had no further word from Mr. Marston; and in due time the evening of the supper arrived. Mr. Oliver and the boys sailed up to the settlement. Landing in the darkness, they found the little hotel blazing with light. The night was mild, and a hum of voices and bursts of laughter drifted out from the open windows of the wooden building. On entering the veranda, they were greeted by the man who had kept the store when Frank first visited the settlement.

"I'm glad to see that you're better," Mr. Oliver remarked.

"Thanks!" replied the other. "I've just got down from Seattle—the doctors have patched me up. It's time I was back at business—things have been getting pretty mixed while I was away." Then he changed the subject. "The boys would make me chairman of this affair, and they're waiting. You're only just on time."

"The wind fell light," said Mr. Oliver. "As there seems to be a good many of them, they needn't have waited for my party if we hadn't come."

"Oh," laughed the storekeeper, "they couldn't begin without—you."

Mr. Oliver looked slightly astonished; but there was

another surprise in store for him and the boys when they entered the largest room in the building. It was, for once, brilliantly lighted; and crossed fir branches hung on the rudely match-boarded wall, with the azure and silver and crimson of the flag gleaming here and there among them. Frank could understand the attempt to decorate the place, because, as a matter of fact, it needed it; but he did not see why the double row of men standing about the long table should break out into an applauding murmur as Mr. Oliver walked in. Most of them had lean, brown faces and toil-hardened hands, and were dressed in duck with a cloth jacket over it and with boots that reached to the knees, but there were two or three in white shirts and neat cloth suits.

"Boys," said the storekeeper, "our guest has now arrived. Though he tells me the wind fell light, he's here on time, which is what we've always found him to be in all his doings." He waved Mr. Oliver to the head of the table. "That's your place. It's my duty to welcome you on behalf of the assembled company."

There was an outbreak of applause, and Mr. Oliver looked around with a smile.

"Thank you, boys," he beamed; "but I don't quite understand. I just came here to talk to you and get my supper."

Amid the laughter that followed there were many voices answering him.

"You'll get it, sure! To-night we'll do the talking — Sproat's been practicing speeches on the innocent trees all day, and Bentley's most as good as a gramophone. We're mighty glad to have you! Sit right down!"

The storekeeper raised his hand for silence.

"You're our guest, Mr. Oliver, and that's all there is to it." He turned to the others and lowered his voice confidentially. "I guess Webster didn't explain the thing to him. Our friend's backward on some occasions

—he doesn't like a fuss—and it's quite likely that if he'd known what to expect he wouldn't have come."

There was another burst of laughter; and when Mr. Oliver had taken his place, with the boys seated near him, Frank noticed for the first time that Mr. Barclay occupied a chair close by. Then he also saw that Mr. Marston, who had written to him, sat almost opposite across the table.

"I got here this afternoon and was trying to hire a horse when I heard that you were expected at this feast," the latter said. "Your people were in first-rate health when I left them."

It was difficult to carry on a conversation across the table, and Frank turned his attention to the meal, which was the best he had sat down to since he reached the bush. By and by the storekeeper stood up.

"Now," he said, "as most of you have laid in a solid foundation, we can talk over the dessert; and I want to remind you that we have several reasons for celebrating this occasion. A start at growing fruit on a big scale has just been made; we're to have a wharf; and there's a wagon trail to be bridged and graded. All this brings you nearer the market. You have held on and put up a good fight with rocks and trees, and now when you'll have no trouble in turning your produce into money you're going to reap the reward of it. But that's not our main business to-night."

There was an encouraging murmur, and he went on:

"We had a few bad men round this settlement—toughs, who had no use for work. Folks of their kind are like the fever—they're infectious—and it's a kind of curious thing that for a while the bad man generally comes out on top. His trouble is that he can't stay there, for something big and heavy is surely going to fall on him sooner or later. Still, those men had a big combine at the back of them and they got hold. They'd

have kept it longer, only that one man had a bigger head than most of us. He'll tell you that the one straight way to get money is to work for it, and that the folks who begin by robbing the Government end by robbing everybody else. He found the combine up against him, but while some of us backed down he stood fast. He wouldn't be fooled or bullied, and, though he didn't go round saying so, when the time came that big and well-handled combine went down. Now it's my pleasant duty to offer your thanks to Mr. Oliver for freeing you from what would have been the ugliest kind of tyranny."

He sat down amid applause, and another man got up.

"I'm glad to second that," he announced. "We were easy with the opium gang when they began. It was pleasant to get a roll of bills now and then for just leaving a team handy and saying nothing if we found a case in the stable; but we didn't see where that led." He stopped and turned to Mr. Barclay, who was smiling at him. "What'd you say, sir?"

"It struck me that you were forgetting what my profession is," Mr. Barclay answered dryly. "You're not compelled to give yourself and your friends away."

This remark was followed by laughter; then the speaker proceeded:

"Anyhow, the dope boys began to change their tone. At first, they paid and asked favors; but when they got folks so they couldn't go back on them they ordered, and seldom paid at all. It was getting what my friend calls tyranny, and the small man had to stand in and ask the gang for leave to live. We'd have been in a mighty tight place now if one rancher hadn't boldly stood out. That's why we're offering our best thanks to Mr. Oliver, who got up and fought the gang."

There was a shout that set the shingles rattling overhead, and when it died away Mr. Oliver, who looked embarrassed, said a few simple words, which were fol-

lowed by riotous applause. Then Frank looking around saw that a sheet of newspaper with three pictures on it was pinned to the wall.

"What's that thing?" he asked, leaning back to touch Harry. "You're nearer it."

One of the men took the paper down and handed it to him.

"Well," he drawled, "I guess you ought to know your own likeness."

Frank gasped as he took the paper, for the two portraits at the top of it were of Harry and himself, and underneath them appeared the dog. There was a conspicuous black heading over them.

"The modest salvors of the opium schooner, and their dog," it read.

Beneath this there was about a column dealing with Mr. Oliver's exploits and their own. Frank glanced at parts of it with blank astonishment.

"You never told him all that stuff," he declared, passing it to Harry.

Mr. Oliver intercepted the paper, and his expression hinted at half-disgusted amusement.

"Didn't you know any better than to tell a story of this kind to a newspaper man?" he asked. "Read a little of it!"

Harry's face flushed as he read.

"I didn't tell him half of it," he protested. "Besides, I didn't know what he was."

Mr. Oliver laughed at last; and just then another man got up and made a speech about Mr. Barclay, who rose and looked down the table with a quiet smile.

"I appreciate what you have said of my doings, boys, and now I'll base my few observations on one of the first speaker's remarks," he began. "He stated that the man who began by robbing the Government would end by robbing everybody else; but he was wrong. The man who robs the Government is robbing every other

citizen. Each of us is part of a system that's built up, we believe, on the rock of the constitution. Otherwise, if you were merely individuals, doing just as you wished, obeying nobody, you could live only like the Indians, holding your ranches and cattle—if you had them—with the rifle. All commerce and security is founded on the fact that we're not separate men, but a nation. Well, the nation wants troops, and warships, judges, courts, schools, and roads. It expects you to pay your share, since you get the benefit, and every man who beats it out of one tax or duty is playing a mean game on and stealing from the rest. That's the one point I want to make clear."

Then, to the confusion of Harry and Frank, they were commended; and afterward the company broke up into groups to talk and smoke. Mr. Oliver and the boys, Mr. Marston, Mr. Webster and Mr. Barclay still sat together, and presently Mr. Barclay turned to the boys.

"I've some news for you," he announced. "The schooner has been surveyed. She's very little damaged, and the authorities, who have seized her, have decided to allow your claim in full. As soon as she's sold, they'll forward you a treasury order."

"And we'll really get all that money?" Frank asked with a gasp.

"It seems pretty certain."

The blood rushed into Frank's face.

"It would go a long way toward buying a small, half-cleared ranch," he exclaimed joyfully.

"I've one to sell," laughed Mr. Webster. "You can have it cheap."

"Are you serious?" Mr. Oliver inquired.

"Sure!" was the answer. "I never was much good at ranching, and the place is too small to feed more than a few head of stock. It might pay growing fruit; but if I did any planting now I'd have to wait three or four years before I got any returns worth while, and I was

always kind of smart at carpentering. I could get contracts for building log bridges and cutting wharf piles now, and I'd let the ranch go at a very moderate price."

"How much do you want?"

When Mr. Webster told him, Mr. Oliver considered the matter for a few moments.

"I'll have to start Harry in another three or four years, and if we put in a lot of young trees they'd be in good bearing by that time," he said thoughtfully.

"We could work the place from our own ranch in the meanwhile; but I'm afraid I can't raise the price you ask. Would you let part stand over on a mortgage?"

"I can't do that," was the reply, "though I'd like to oblige you. You see, if I'm to handle those contracts properly, I must have the money to buy tools and to pay wages. But suppose we appoint two valuers to fix a figure."

The boys had been listening intently, and Frank broke in:

"Harry and I have decided to go partners in a ranch some day, and there's the salvage money."

"It wouldn't be enough," said Mr. Oliver regretfully.

Mr. Marston touched Mr. Oliver's shoulder.

"I'd like a few words with you privately."

They crossed the room, and after talking for a while in low tones Mr. Marston beckoned Frank, who had been waiting in tense excitement. Mr. Marston was a middle-aged business man, with keen eyes and a thoughtful face, and he looked at Frank steadily.

"Sit down and listen to me," he said. "Because I'm a relative of yours and also because I had a great respect for your father, I meant from the beginning to help you along. On the other hand, I've seen young men spoiled by knowing that they had friends ready to give them a lift, and I decided to let you make the best fight you could, for a year or two. That's why I sent you to the flour mill, instead of putting you into something easier;

and I may say that I wasn't altogether pleased when you left it."

"I was turned out, sir," Frank corrected him with some color in his face.

Mr. Marston smiled.

"We'll let it go at that. The main thing is that you didn't come back for help. Instead, you made another start for yourself; and you seem to have done well here. According to a newspaper which I've read, you have even distinguished yourself lately." He laughed before he proceeded. "Anyway, you have shown that one could have some confidence in you."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Marston raised his hand.

"Let me finish. Before I left Boston I went over your mother's business affairs, and by and by I think she could give you — we'll say a thousand dollars; you have your share of the salvage payment; and Mr. Oliver is willing to lay out some money on his son's account. Well, I'll find the balance — on a mortgage — but you'll have to make the ranch pay, or" — and he smiled — "I'll certainly foreclose and turn you out."

Frank tried to thank him, but he could find very little to say in his excitement. Then Mr. Marston called Harry.

"I understand that you are anxious to take Mr. Webster's ranch with Frank, and would be willing to work it under your father's direction until the youngest of you is twenty-one. Is that correct?"

Harry's face was glowing.

"Yes, sir," he answered eagerly. "We'll do what we can."

"Then if your father and Mr. Webster will go down to Seattle with me, we'll get the transfer made and a deed drawn up to fix the thing."

Frank could never remember what he said or did during the next few minutes, but it was the proudest and

happiest time he had spent in his life. Then he turned to Mr. Marston and Mr. Oliver, who were standing near.

"I'll have very little time to spare after this," he said, "and I should like to spend a little of the salvage money going back to Boston to see my mother and the others before I begin."

"Of course!" ejaculated Mr. Marston. "A very proper thing! You needn't wait until Mr. Barclay sends you his order. I'll arrange your ticket."

He moved away, and shortly afterward the company dispersed.

A week later Frank and Harry and Jake sailed out in the sloop to intercept the south-bound steamer. She came up, with side-wheels churning a broad track of foam and her smoke trail streaming astern. When her engines stopped, Frank and Harry dropped into the canoe and in a few minutes they were alongside. Frank swung himself up on board and then looked back at the canoe.

"Have a good time!" cried Harry. "The best you can! You'll have to work when you come back!"

"You'll see me in six weeks," Frank answered with a wave of his hand; and the canoe dropped astern as the engines started and the steamer forged ahead.

THE END

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